



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600078932Z





SO YOUNG, MY LORD, AND TRUE.



SO YOUNG, MY LORD, AND TRUE.

J. Nobel.

BY
CHARLES QUENTIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1878.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND CO.,
LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



	Page
CHAPTER I.	
“ Summer, with Flowers that Fell ”	1
CHAPTER II.	
“ Loud Words and Longing are so Little Worth ”	9
CHAPTER III.	
“ Many Waters cannot quench Love ”	19
CHAPTER IV.	
“ The Countenance of Stern Commandment ”	29
CHAPTER V.	
A Visitor	39
CHAPTER VI.	
“ The Moon is Up ”	51
CHAPTER VII.	
“ Can the Devil Speak True ? ”	62
CHAPTER VIII.	
“ Pity Swells the Tide of Love ”	72

	XIII.	
at "		
PRINT LITTLE QU	CHAPTER XIV.	
"Come May"		
"Follows the Wind that Profits Nobody"	CHAPTER XV.	
"Famula, Unfriended"	CHAPTER XVI.	1
"Laborare Est Orare"	CHAPTER XVII.	161
"She's Beautiful; and therefore to be Woo'd"	CHAPTER XVIII.	178
"How Shall We Beguile the Lazy Time"	CHAPTER XIX.	191
"Sae Smooth his Speech"	CHAPTER XX.	206
		221

CHAPTER XXIV.

"FELL."

her, or the
The soft
ly one
ind.
a

	Page
CHAPTER IX.	
“ She Was His Life ”	86
CHAPTER X.	
“ Constrained to Choose ”	100
CHAPTER XI.	
“ A Little Pleasure of Life ”	111
CHAPTER XII.	
“ Great Length of Deadly Days ”	124
CHAPTER XIII.	
“ Ce Que Femme Veut, Dieu Veut ”	135
CHAPTER XIV.	
“ Come What Come May ”	146
CHAPTER XV.	
“ Ill Blows the Wind that Profits Nobody ”	159
CHAPTER XVI.	
“ Remote, Unfriended ”	166
CHAPTER XVII.	
“ Laborare Est Orare ”	178
CHAPTER XVIII.	
“ She’s Beautiful ; and therefore to be Woo’d ”	191
CHAPTER XIX.	
“ How Shall We Beguile the Lazy Time ”	206
CHAPTER XX.	
“ Sae Smooth his Speech ”	221

Contents.

vii

	Page
CHAPTER XXI.	
“ His own Opinion was his Law ”	235
CHAPTER XXII.	
“ Be Well Advised ”	250
CHAPTER XXIII.	
“ Achievement is Command ”	261
CHAPTER XXIV.	
“ The End Crowns All.”	275



CHAPTER I.

"SUMMER, WITH FLOWERS THAT FELL."

ADA loved nature ; no one could take it from her, or the warm southern soul that responded to it. The soft wind which blew tenderly was a caress—the only one she received—but it kept her heart warm and kind. The flowers which lifted their faces to heaven made her believe in beauty and love, and the dumb creatures she loved—her dog and her horse—looked at her with frank eyes which showed their faith in her, and taught her the sweet dependence there is in bird and beast and human creature ; each on each throughout creation. She understood the voice of nature and its strong, pure influence ; and she attributed her sympathy with its teachings, not unduly—to her mother's blood which glowed in her young veins.

Some people receive shocks of wonder when they travel, and see a beautiful country. When they come upon a silent lake sleeping under an azure sky, such as they see not at home, they say, "How fine !" and with those words have got rid of their astonishment, but even for a brief moment it has not seemed more to them than a blue sky and a blue lake. How can it be otherwise to those who lead cooped-up lives, and have only money-making tendencies. Nature is so rich in beauty that she will not accept as a disciple any

one who has kept his eyes on the ground most of his life, and can only spare her a few moments of false admiration.

We get in this world very much what we are capable of receiving. If we love nature, she gives us joy uncharily. If we struggle hard for money-bags, we generally get them in time, and much good they do us !

Ada's poetic nature nourished itself in lonely rambles at Oaklands, and in many an hour's stretch under the shady trees, far away from the house and from the unmelodious sound of hateful voices. She generally took a book, some old book she had found in the library, with long ss and a musty smell, but she did not read much on those lazy days, for nature was speaking to her so eloquently she could not but listen. The branches of the trees above her just waved and fell, like the gentle toss of a child's arm in a happy dream. Under the boughs she told herself many a story, and the heroes and heroines in them were mostly brave, gentle, and true, because she was so herself and did not know much of the cruel world outside—the world of cowardice and treachery. She wished for Sydney's return, for she missed him greatly, and Oaklands was altogether a more bearable place when he was there. She told herself that he would have got over that silly love for her and a trustful brotherly love would be there in its stead, and they would be happy.

Ada set no value on her beauty. She was glad and contented to be pretty. It would have been sad for her, with her artistic nature, had it been otherwise. Perhaps nature would not have taught her so much, nor been so loved by her, if in scattering such beauty around, she had withheld the gift from her. There is a fitness about things in life which we often fail to see.

The old bitterness about that parting with Kingsley had gone. In fine natures, that sting which is half hurt pride goes, though the sadness goes not.

His influence was still in her life. From contact with his mind she had become awake to her ignorance, and the faintest allusion he had made, in that time past, to any writer he sympathized with, or any study which had been a culture to him, was remembered; the works were sought out by her, pored over, and understood as best she could. Thus she held communion with his friends; those who had counselled him and made him what he was.

Ada's love for Kingsley died not; it did not seem to her that it ever could, but how could she be altogether unhappy under the green trees in the summer time; standing in the glorious temple that God has built for himself?

I do not marvel when I read of bitter deaths in fast modern cities. I think as I see the multitudes hurrying past that they are crushing out the life from their fellows, under their restless feet. Is it strange that the miserable should be swift to find quiet amid the roar of millions of indifferent fellow-creatures, where the sunshine seems like a smile of scorn? But by the waving grass or corn-fields, or in sight of the purple glow upon the hills, it seems too wicked to be impatient of life; and nature gives peace to those who love her. Has she not always some new sweetness, some new beauty, some new glance of love? As a woman has always some new allurements for her lover. "Life cannot wither nor custom stale her infinite variety."


Often Ada thanked God for the deep worship of nature that was in her heart, but in her thankfulness there was sometimes a little pharasaical rejoicing that she was

not as Sylvia, who in summer lay on the sofa all day and fanned herself, saying that the heat was intolerable; or if she went out was always armed with a veil and parasol, lest the sun should spoil her exquisitely toneless complexion. As to Ada, the sun and the winds touched her lovingly, and gave to her skin a tender warmth without dimming its clear fairness.

Sydney stayed at Oxford for the Commemoration and he did not seem very anxious to return, for now it was July and he had not yet come back. They had begun to give up expecting him. Strange to say, Mr. St. George did not complain of his prolonged absence. Sometimes when he received a letter from him, he would remark that "Master Sydney seemed to be enjoying himself, and that he was a gay young dog."

Sydney never wrote to Ada. At first she was a little disappointed and wondered what it meant, but afterwards she was glad and wisely concluded that she had been right, and that new scenes and new interests had blotted out his foolish, boyish fancy. On these glorious July days, Ada sometimes took even her music out with her under her favourite beech-trees, and would sing over some of the old melodies which were like voices of the past, and were so sacred to her that, with an almost foolish reverence, she could not touch them save where she was unheard. She smiled at herself often; it seemed so romantic to go out into the woods to sing; and certainly, if she had been detected, she would have felt inexpressibly silly. But no one intruded into her temple.

One day she sat reading much longer than her wont; forgot all about lunch, indeed all about herself and every one, so interested was she in her book. She was follow-



ing eagerly where the writer took her, and her mental eyes were opening at each step with wonder and delight. The little woodland noises she took no heed of; the scurry of a rabbit, the rustle of a bird amongst the leaves; nor did she notice when, added to these, there was the sound of a footstep coming cautiously close to her. At last she paused from fulness of thought, and looking up saw Sydney standing opposite to her.

She jumped up with a glad welcome.

"You have come at last," she said, giving him her hand and looking at him in her old fond way. He was changed. It only took a moment to see it; only a moment to see that the sweet boyish look had gone from his eyes and the freshness from his cheek. He had grown thin too, and his coat hung on him loosely.

"You are not looking well, Sydney," she said quickly, before he had time to speak.

"Oh! I am all right," he said, but his eyes moved from hers restlessly.

The sun was over all, beautifying hill and dale, dancing through the green leaves and laughing on the streams; youth and joyousness seemed to spring to life in its smile. On Sydney it seemed to smite; it showed the hollowness of his cheek, the transparency of his hands. He looked like a tender plant, rudely transplanted, which shrinks and shivers under the sun's blaze, because there is no vital sap in its veins.

Ada was startled and horrified.

"So this is your haunt, Ady," he said, seeming glad to turn attention from himself. "Your study and sanctum sanctorum, eh?"

"Yes, is it not a nice place?"

"Let us see what you have got here," he said, taking

up her book. "Such words of wisdom, enough to give one the blues!"

"Music too!" he exclaimed, as he lighted on a small, bound volume which Ada had brought out with her. "You don't mean to say you sing out here?"

"Yes," she said, blushing a little, "why not?"

"It's a funny notion. Why do you want to keep your voice to yourself? When we live together, we might as well give each other the benefit of our gifts."

He leaned wearily against the beech-tree.

"I think," he added mischievously, "I'll tell the rest that you retire to the fastnesses of the woods to sing!"

"No, you won't be so disagreeable, Sydney. I'll sing for you as often as you like."

"You will for *me*? You will have to now, for I'll hold this threat of laughing at you perpetually before your eyes."

He looked at her for a moment with something of the old light in his eyes, but it was fitful and passed away.

"Is it as delightful here as ever?" he asked. "My father as plausible and—and, what shall we call it?—circuitous, that's a good word! Sylvia as indolent and complaining?"

"Just the same, I think."

"And you, how can you stand it?"

"Well enough," she answered, with her usual little shrug of the shoulders, half contemptuous, half weary. "I forget them as often as I can."

"As you were doing to-day when I found you. I had been watching you for full ten minutes, Ady. You are looking very well, you are prettier than ever."

"Oxford has taught you to pay compliments!"

 You have."

He returned to the subject of Ada's singing suddenly.

"I can't think, Ady," he said, "why you don't sing for us every evening; it would make it so much jollier, but you women are so strange!"

"Perhaps we are, Sydney, but I don't suppose you know much about it," and she laughed at him heartily.

His advanced and manly views on the subject of women, which he meant to do him much service, seemed rather absurd as he looked in Ada's frank eyes, and in spite of his gain in age and experience, he felt more uncomfortable in her presence than he had ever felt before. It was happier, that boyish homage he had paid to her, though it made him sad, than the feverish determination to make her love him, which he had brought back with him from Oxford—a determination born of that pitiful logic which youngsters learn so quickly when they have shaken off the purity of their home and have "seen life" as they call it—*viz.*, other women have loved me, why should not she?

"Have you seen the others?" asked Ada,

"No, I asked the servant if you were in the house, and hearing you were out, I came here; I thought I was sure to find you under your favourite trees."

"How cross Sylvia will be at your looking for me first, why did you do it?"

"Oh! bother Sylvia, she must get over it."

"Let us go in now."

He followed her listlessly.

"You stayed a long time at Oxford; we have been expecting you for two weeks or more."

"I could not get away; there were a lot of parties, something to go to every night. It has done me up rather; it has been infernally hot in Oxford."

Last year Sydney had not been so careless in his language. The change did not escape Ada's notice.

"I think you want the quiet of the country. You will grow fat and strong soon."

This was said as an assurance to herself, for it teased her that he looked so sickly, and she remembered that his mother had died of consumption.

"I think it would have been better if I had stayed away—you don't care, and my father, with all his sweet ways, can make himself so uncommonly disagreeable. At Oxford there is always some excitement if a fellow is down on his luck."

None of the change in Sydney escaped Ada, though she did not quite understand. With practical ignorance of the world, she had a quickness of perception and sympathy which made things plain to her, of which truly she had no knowledge. She realised what Sydney's life had been since he had left them, and in a vague way she knew what kind of atmosphere he had been living in—saw it in his altered appearance and discontented manner. She saw also that his love for her still lived, but it was changed a little she knew not how; was somewhat less noble; had somewhat of the world's dimness on it.

CHAPTER II.

“LOUD WORDS AND LONGING ARE SO LITTLE WORTH.”

SYDNEY'S was a pleasure-loving nature, with a deep well of kindness, ready to spring forth to any soul that called on it; guileless too as yet but without much mental calibre; impatient of any pain, looking upon it as wholly unmerited and unjustifiable when it came to him. A lad with honourable impulses and much contempt for shuffling ways. A character seemingly of great promise, which would lead you to hope for deeds more noble than those of his fellows, and a life finer and simpler,—but a character that failed to fulfil your hopes, because it was nothing more nor less than what it looked on the surface. Not a grain of malice in it, but weak, as souls must be who are not brave enough to give their shoulders to the lash without wincing—the lash, which shrink, and shirk it as they will, falls steadily. The world has many such. Sydney had gone from Ada sorely hurt, because he loved her, and he did not like the stinging pain which came to him in quiet hours; which worried him when he tried to cram for his examinations; which made him restless and wakeful at night; which made him long, at first, to rush back again to Oaklands, that he might have those quiet walks and rides again, and speak of all he dreamed of and hoped for, but he tried to forget. Older and wiser men have done the same, and he was only a boy. The dissipation which we imagine to be a

Lethe's cup is always at hand ; there is always some enchantress ready to offer it to our lips and, generally, we weakly accept it.

Sydney had gained new experiences, new thoughts now. He had seen a great deal of the world. He had taken up subjects, and got superficial ideas about them ; had studied music in a half-hearted way, and had just got as much knowledge as he had asked for, which was little. He had trifled with women ; they had flattered him, and he thought he understood them. He had made some lucky hit in a speech at a wine-party, his comrades had applauded him, and he became possessed with the idea that in him were latent powers of oratory. Is not this the history of dozens, nay hundreds of men ? There is no thoroughness in them ; they know not what it is to be in earnest : they cannot even enjoy idleness ; their unsatisfied minds are longing for something, they know not what. Oh, the wretched twaddle that religionists talk about the contemptibleness of things of time and sense ! Are they not everything to us ? The air we breathe ; the scenes we look on ; the things we touch and handle ; the people we know and love ; the thoughts we nurture day by day—are they not precious, our very own, to make us God-like or devil-like ? Can we call back any little minute that we have spent listlessly, and would not tolerate because we wanted the next one ? What do we know about the future ? Shall the minutes all rise up and offer themselves again to be better spent and prized, or shall they—like the dead friend whom we have injured and asked no forgiveness of while living—go beyond our reach for ever ?

The great curse of all our lives is that we take what is easy. We drift, and say it is best.

Sydney was affectionate, and his love for Ada did not die, but the chivalrous simplicity of it was gone. Ada recognised this when he came back, and was sorry for *him*; not for herself, as most women would have been, for there is a certain littleness in some women's souls which makes the love men give them a purely personal matter, and it is to them seldom a question how that love will influence the minds and lives of the men who give it, but a pitiful consideration of what is due to themselves, and how far it falls short of that which they consider the full measure of their deservings. Ada's heart was sad for Sydney on that summer's day, when everything was rejoicing in health and beauty. As she looked at his young face, prematurely weary in its expression, she thought of the picture of his mother, and of the rest which she had found.

Have you not seen the flower or plant which droops its weary head and trails its nerveless leaves on the earth, or the stricken bird which hangs its tired wings listlessly?

Do they not both find rest ere long?

A little way from the house they met Mr. St. George. He wore his usual smile. When had he adopted it? Had it been born with him, that perfectly well-regulated smile, which seemed always to stretch his lips to a certain point, no more, no less?

"Ah, Sydney, my boy!" he said, and he took his hand and clapped him on the shoulder. "You were a long time coming to us. Too dull a place for a fashionable man like you, eh?"

"No, but I thought I might as well see the fun at Oxford. The Commemoration is a thing to see, you know, father." This was said with outward carelessness,

but there was a horrible consciousness accompanying it, of bills to be paid, and his father's blandness disappearing at the announcement.

They were all walking together now.

"He is looking well, is he not?" Mr. St. George asked Ada abruptly, turning towards her with a peering look in his eyes.

She was surprised. She could never get accustomed to his tortuous ways.

"Well? No; I do not think so, he is looking pale and thin."

"The heat has knocked him up perhaps, but we'll take care of him, and make him strong, shall we not?" And again he looked at Ada in a confident way with that smile of his. Of course, he saw that Sydney looked ill, but why should he say so? Let Ada see it for herself. Women were so fearfully contradictory and suspicious. If he said so, most likely she would think he had some hidden motive for it, and of course say that Sydney was all right. [There was no object that Mr. St. George had in view that could not, in his opinion, be helped on by prevarication.] Sydney had gone the first thing to see Ada and talk to her; why not take it for granted that all was smooth between them, but that they had a childish desire for concealment? Natural enough, it added to the romance. The boy did look ill; the effect of Oxford dissipation probably. All young men were the same; no harm in it if he did not spend money, and he trusted he was not such a confounded fool as to do that.

After these reflections Mr. St. George talked about the professors and Dons of Sydney's College; he had been an Oxford man himself.

Both father and son were talking to the hollow representations of themselves, not to their real souls. We dress up figures to act and speak, and hide ourselves within, and if we respect our neighbour's mask, we expect him to respect ours.

They came in and Sylvia looked up from her sofa, with a languid air of interest as Sydney walked over to her side and kissed her cheek.

"You came some time ago, did you not?" she asked.

"Yes, I have been here a little while."

"About three hours, you mean. Too much trouble to come in and see me?"

This was in a tone intended to sound playful, but sounding very snappish.

"Not at all, I did not know where you were."

"He joined Ada in the wood," his father interposed.

"Very natural, why should you find fault with the boy?"

He walked across the room as he spoke and pulling up the blind near where Sylvia lay, gave her a look.

Ada felt herself getting hot; what was this new mode of attack?

"I think it is time to dress for dinner, shall I help you upstairs?" she asked.

"No, thank you. Sydney is here. Don't worry me, and shut the door after you when you go."

So Ada went.

"You have not got over your idiotcy about that girl yet?" Sylvia said.

Mr. St. George stood and arranged the blind and said nothing as yet. Sylvia was privileged to say what she liked, besides he considered that a little opposition from some quarter was rather a stimulant than otherwise.

"Come, drop that subject, Sylvia; you need not begin worrying a fellow before he is an hour in the house."

Then he gave a glance at his father's back, as if to say,

"At least not while the governor is present."

That personage, having an extraordinary knack of understanding everything, turned round and said,

"Why do you tease Sydney? Wait till you have an understanding with some fascinating young fellow, and you will have more mercy. Of course, he had to go and make some pretty excuse for finding any attractions to detain him at Oxford."

With this very wily and unanswerable speech, he left the room.

"Does my father think it is all right with Ada?" thought Sydney. He was conscious of a faint sensation of pleasure, half from soothed vanity, half from imagined happiness, and yet he felt a little bit mean at allowing the wrong impression to live, and leaving that speech unanswered.

What did it matter after all? Perhaps Ada had said something to his father during his absence, something which gave some foundation for what his father had just said. Why should she not like him? No other fellow had ever made love to her. Perhaps she thought little of him when she fancied herself secure of his love, but now that he had gone into the world, perhaps she remembered that there were other pretty girls to fall in love with.

"I cannot think what you see to admire in Ada; a sort of face I can see no beauty in; a heavy face without any sweetness or gentleness in it, and a head of hair like a negro's."

"There is no use discussing her appearance, Sylvia, I dare say you do not admire her."

"Besides," she went on, "she will never care for you, she cares too much for herself, and is so conceited that she thinks herself better than every one else."

"What's the good of abusing her? Can't you leave her alone? She does far more for you than you would do for her."

"I am a wretched invalid, and after all, I ask her to do very little for me."

"It is as dull as usual here, I suppose!" said Sydney, trying to turn the conversation.

"Yes, quite. Why do you not bring some of your Oxford friends down here? We never see a soul, except the neighbours now and then."

"Well, I did ask a fellow to come, in a sort of a way; but I don't know how the governor would like it, and there is nothing for him to do here."

"Ask him for the partridge shooting."

"All right, if the governor consents. I suppose you want to get up a flirtation with him! I don't think he is that sort of man, but perhaps you'll fascinate him, Syl. He must be devilish well off."

As he ended, he looked at his watch.

"Just dinner time, by Jove! Shall I carry you upstairs?"

He took her up as he spoke. As he put her down at her door, he gasped for breath, and coughed.

"You've grown uncommonly heavy. I don't think there can be much the matter with you."

"No, of course not," she said sarcastically, "one finds it a pleasure to lie down all day."

Dinner was got through in the usual manner. Mr. St.

George making pompous remarks on Shakespeare, thinking of other things all the time, and no one listening to him of course. Sylvia pushing her plate away, and looking with an aggrieved air at Ada; Sydney drank much wine, and looked feverish and ill. The conversation turned on hunting.

"Was there a good season last winter, father."

"Pretty well. There was a long stretch of severe frost which put a stop to sport for a while."

"Did Mrs. Scott come to grief?"

"She had one bad fall."

"What can you expect, when she rides such screws?"

There is an age at which an air of much wisdom in horse flesh is a necessity to the young Englishman.

"Why does her husband allow her to hunt?" asked Sylvia; "the hunting-field is no place for a woman."

"I don't see why he should prevent her if she wants to. Do you, Ada?"

Sydney always contradicted his sister.

"If their tastes are not alike, no amount of bullying would make them so, I should think."

"It is a husband's right and duty," said Mr. St. George in his most sententious manner, "to insist on his wife giving up such things as he does not approve of."

"I don't think anyone in the world has the right absolutely to control another?" said Ada hotly.

"That is quite a doctrine of your own, Ada," said Sylvia, "fortunately it is not accepted in the world."

"The law may give men the power, but if it had to be enforced, happiness would be at an end."

"I am afraid, dear," said her uncle, "you do not know much about such matters; you are too young."

"Not too young," she answered impetuously, "to know that people who live together must have some similarity of tastes and mutual forbearance for each other's opinions, if they are to live the life of reasonable intelligent beings."

"There is a way of ruling, without fighting," said Mr. St. George.

"What is it?" she asked in a kind of defiant way.

Mr. St. George treated them to one of his smiles, and said,

"It is indescribable; some men can do it."

"Is it saying yes, and gradually working round to no? Smiling when you are angry—make an outward show of pleasing others, and an inward study of pleasing yourself? Because if that is it, there is nothing more contemptible, and the nature that rules in that way must be untrue at the core!"

Sylvia leaned back, used her smelling-bottle, and then said with a little laugh,

"What a thrilling sentence! Most effective if you were on the stage. What makes you so indignant, you have not got a tyrannical spouse?"

But Ada was looking at her uncle, as if for a reply.

"What do you expect me to say, my dear niece? I think violent argument such bad manners; besides, you misunderstand me; I was not alluding to any special way of using one's authority. I merely say that there is a way of using it without compulsion, and it is necessary to use it sometimes."

As this sentence terminated, Ada felt very hot and awkward. After all, she appeared very silly, and her uncle's part in the conversation seemed the right and sensible one. Who was there present that would see

the gleam of truth in what she had said? She had only placed herself in a ridiculous light, but she sometimes grew heartily sick of acquiescing by her silence, in foolish groundless opinions about things, which people were too selfish or indolent to think about; and thus it happened, that after long forbearance, while subjects of real interest were discussed, she would suddenly fire up on some trifling occasion; in most cases inopportunately, sometimes ridiculously, yet the feeling which prompted her speech was a true one. Painful and useless as such indignation was to herself, it was always a sort of moral clearing of the atmosphere. They did not see it, of course not, except perhaps Sydney, who in a weak way agreed with Ada, but thought there was no good in making a fuss.

CHAPTER III.

“MANY WATERS CANNOT QUENCH LOVE.”

THEY went into the drawing-room. The window stood slightly ajar, and Ada pushed it open and went out. It was a still summer's evening with a little whispering wind coming through the trees fitfully.

“You had better not go out, there is a heavy dew falling,” Sylvia said in a tone of cousinly concern.

“I don't mind it,” Ada answered, standing a minute by the window. “You know I am always accustomed to go out at all hours.”

Sydney walked restlessly round the table, then joined Ada at the window.

“It is horribly hot in here, it was a good move of yours to go out, Ada.”

“You will not make Sydney go out with his cough,” said Sylvia, “whatever foolish thing you may choose to do yourself.”

“I do not want him to come, I should prefer being alone ; I suppose he knows how to take care of himself without my telling him.”

She moved away from the window. How softly the wind fanned her hot cheeks ! How kind and good everything seemed out in the garden ! What sweet lives the flowers led, growing in beauty and filling the air with their fragrance, so that calm, pure thoughts came from

being near them. Were there no human lives like theirs?

Ada walked through the open space of garden swiftly, but when she reached the trees she went more softly and slowly. She had not gone far before Sydney joined her.

"Why did you come out?" she said rather sharply.

"Because I liked; it was not lively in the house."

"This will be another sin which Sylvia will put down to me."

"What a rage you got into at dinner!" Sydney said irrelevantly; "what was the good, Ada?"

"Am I never to say what I think? I cannot live under the same roof with people and always suppress myself.

"But it was all about nothing! What on earth does it signify to you whether Scott bullies his wife or not?"

"Of course it was idiotic and all about nothing to you; and of course you could not see that it had nothing whatever to say to Mrs. Scott. It came of things that were in my own mind, but if one is perpetually living an unreal sort of life and never speaking out, one says things occasionally at the wrong time. But do not let us say anything more about it, you do not understand."

They had walked on through the trees and now turned down the low wood walk. Ada was growing quieter.

Passionate impetuosity belongs to fine natures. When we grow older we do not chafe so much at trifles, but in youth, indifference is phlegmatic selfishness.

"I do not understand," Sydney repeated. "You always say that. Why should I not? Are you so much above me? I have always stuck up for you, can't you explain yourself?"

"There is nothing to explain; I have been cross, that is all," she said more gently.

Then after a moment's silence she went on,

"I think unhappiness makes one wicked; in spite of what people say about sorrow being for our good. It was so easy to be gentle and kind and never say sharp things long ago; so easy to believe in every one and think that they had kind motives for their actions."

Her warm artistic nature sought expression, and she was speaking half to herself, half to Sydney.

"It is only children who can believe in everything," he answered, "when a fellow goes into the world, he soon finds out what a humbug it is."

How flat it sounded! How pointless! said by a lad who had never struggled with the world and found out its deceptions, but had a general idea that everything was a lie, because he had heard other men say so—men who had made it a lie for themselves. Ada did not speak for a while after that.

"But why are you unhappy? Why was it so different before?" Sydney asked, with sudden curiosity about her former life.

The moon would not rise till late; it was getting dark and a soft duskiness was over everything. Ada was thinking of the days at Homburg and the walks under the elms, and Sydney's voice aroused her unpleasantly.

"Because," she said, "papa was simple and true, and always said what he meant, and we understood one another."

"Well, it is different now, certainly, but perhaps the governor would not be so aggravating if you did not fight with him and had not such a low opinion of him."

"I've done my very best to think well of him; I do not suppose most people do mean and contemptible things,

knowing they are mean and contemptible ; and often if we could see things from their point of view, we should find that they had some grain of just reason for their acts and words, but I have stretched my imagination to the farthest about your father, and I can't think him anything but treacherous and untrue. There, you drove me to say it, and I think it is hypocritical to appear to like any one when I do not." After a pause she went on, "I wonder what he looks like to himself ; I should like to know ; surely he must be better than what I think him. I wish I could see it. We lack the keys to each other's natures ; they are shut-up rooms into which we peer through the windows and see indistinctly, unless there be a light within which makes them clear."

She seldom talked in this way, and Sydney wondered at her ; but he was young, and in youth there is always a touch of poetry, and he liked her to speak to him in a way she did not speak to others.

"Will you be offended, Ada, if I say that you are a little bit conceited ; you are proud, and keep yourself aloof from every one."

"Indeed I don't," said Ada angrily. "Do you forget at first how eager I was to love you all, and be loved, but you were as cold as ice and my warmth was thought undignified and un-English ?"

"I cold ! Ada, what are you thinking of ?"

"Oh ! I did not mean you, I meant your family ; I was not thinking of you."

"Of course not," he said huffily ; "I am much too insignificant. But," he added more eagerly, "I have loved you always and have taken your part and got into scrapes for you, why can't you love me ? Other girls have been in love with me, why can't you ?"

This speech struck Ada as so ludicrous that she could not help laughing.

"I beg your pardon, Sydney," she said the moment after, "but it was so funny of you to say that; what has the fact of other girls being in love with you got to do with me?"

"I mean," he said, blushing, "that I am not *quite* ugly or stupid since any one can like me."

"You are not at all ugly or stupid, Sydney," Ada said, putting her hand in his arm as she spoke. She felt sorry for having laughed; she was sure he was hurt. "Why should not people love you? I do; I think you are a dear boy, and I feel as if you were my brother."

"I wish you did not," he said more earnestly. "Will you never care differently, Ada?"

"How can I tell?" she said wearily; "I think not."

It was an evening such as Ada loved. The moon was just rising above the upper wood, and it threw its light on the topmost boughs and on the high ground, but it had not yet reached the dell where they were walking. It was an evening when the brain is filled with thoughts; with questions you cannot answer; with doubts and wonderings; when words seem empty and useless things; we do not want to hear them, and the presence of any one is oppressive, unless it be some one whose soul is so enwrapped in ours that it needs no speech.

"Do you know, Ada," Sydney went on, "that you were always in my mind while I was away? Always—always. I tried to forget you, goodness knows, but it was no use."

Her influence was strong as ever now; he was in earnest and his little vanities were forgotten, poor boy!

Ada had not been thinking much about him, and now

she was sorry that she had not turned the conversation into some other channel. Those passionate words, when they met no response, would only leave the heart sore.

"I studied, and I could not forget; I gambled, and I could not forget; I drank, and it was the same; I tried to dazzle or disgust myself with women, but it only made me remember you more lovingly and think how different you were."

She had never heard him speak like this before.

"Stop, stop, Sydney," she said, "it is sad, horribly sad. I would do anything, but I can't help it."

It is a terrible sensation to any unselfish, kind-hearted man or woman to feel that the whole love of a life is given to them without reserve, and there can be no return.

"I know; you have said that before."

He stopped walking and stood facing her.

"But I can't believe it. You are fanciful, you live in your books, and you don't interest yourself in the lives around you."

He seemed to have grown years older as he was speaking. A great emotion expands the soul; it is mature and complete in the twinkling of an eye.

"You have never cared for any one; you don't know what love is; try to love me a little, Ada."

Should she tell him? He would know then how hopeless it was. She could not do it; no one knew, not even Kingsley himself; how could she tell this boy? So she was silent. Sydney seemed to wait for her to say something, but she did not speak, so he went on,—

"They talk of the warmth of the Italian nature! I think you are colder than the coldest Englishwoman. Do you know, Ada, that you are sending me to the devil as fast as you can?"

"What do you mean, Sydney?" she asked in a horrified tone; but she knew as she spoke, and was roused from her dreaminess to see the cruel reality of things.

"Oh, I need not explain. I suppose I ought not to talk to you about these things—a girl ought to be left to imagine that a young man's life consists of getting up in the morning, taking his meals, working at his profession or cramming for it, and going to bed again; and if he has got any wrong feelings, overcoming them, but I don't believe in that bosh. It won't hurt you to know that life is not a milk-and-waterish sort of thing. There are plenty of bad inclinations in one, and you said just now yourself that unhappiness makes one wicked."

He was not speaking for effect now, and so his words told, for they were strong and true.

Ada felt she *must* grapple with this mood of Sydney's, but for a moment she felt quite helpless. It was so horrible that she should harm him, and she felt his crushed hopes, his ruined life, his moral degradation like a great weight on her heart.

The moon was well up now. How pale it made him look! And his eyes had never seemed so deep set or so sad!

"Dear Sydney," she began with a calm which came of intense nervousness, "if you love me truly, you will never think like that or act like that. I don't mind your telling me about your life—it is true it will not hurt me, though it pains me horribly.

"Horribly," she repeated with a little shudder, "but it is only weakness to give way to sorrow and let it master one. Do you think I am ever likely to love you, if your love for me only makes your life worthless and contemptible."

"What do you want me to do? Have no feeling, and so destroy the power which separates a man from a beast?"

"Shall I tell you the kind of love I believe in? A love that is strong to live nobly even if unreturned—a love that glorifies every act and thought and word. It is sad perhaps, but is there no beauty in the soft dark days, when the plants grow and are refreshed? Must there always be sunshine? It will come sometimes. Emerson says, 'It is thought a disgrace to love unrequited, but the great will see that true love cannot be unrequited,' and he is right. I should be ashamed of my love if it debased me, if it made me stoop to an ignoble life."

She spoke fervently, for her heart was in her words and she felt that they must have some effect. He moved restlessly backwards and forwards.

"I dare say there is some truth in all that," he said, "but how can you tell? You have never felt it, though you speak as if you had."

He paused an instant as if he thought some confession might follow.

"I suppose," he continued, "I have not got a very fine nature, and if I can't be happy I must try and forget, somehow."

"But excitement does not do it; how can it? Does not the power of anything you turn your back on, and try to ignore, become tenfold greater than if you face it calmly? What has your excitement at Oxford done? You have grown thin and ill, much less capable of fighting against things, and have got false notions about life and happiness."

Her nervousness and excitability had grown stronger

as she spoke, and the tears fell when she stopped, but she turned her head away lest Sydney should see them.

A screech owl in a tree close by began its melancholy cry, and it seemed to make everything more dreary. A sensitive soul is always touched by any sight or sound in nature which is an echo of its own mood.

At first Sydney did not notice that Ada was crying, then suddenly he suspected it, and he caught her hands and turned her face to the moonlight.

"I am awfully sorry, dear," he said with a pretty, boyish tenderness, "don't cry, I won't worry you any more. I know I've been an awful fool at Oxford, and I ought to be ashamed of myself."

"I won't cry," she said, brushing her hand across her eyes, "but I am so sorry about it all, so sorry."

"It was very horrible of me to worry you, you poor little thing; I ought to keep my troubles to myself," and he ended with a sigh.

"No, don't, Sydney; tell me always. You know I care for you, much more than your father or sister, and you are the only one in the world that cares for me, and I am not going to fall in love with some one else." She laughed a little tearfully. "So why should you not tell me everything?"

He pressed her hands in his and dropped them, and they turned towards the house.

"All that you say sounds very well, but it is not quite what I want; but I suppose I must not cry for the moon." After a little while he said, "I am going to have a delightful scene with the governor to-morrow. I am going to ask him for money to pay some of the most pressing of my Oxford debts. Don't you envy me?"

"Do you owe much, Sydney?" she asked, with a

vague wonder as to what he could spend money on, and complete ignorance how a young man's first pecuniary difficulties weigh on him.

"Oh! a good deal," he answered.

When they entered the drawing-room, Mr. St. George and Sylvia, who had been talking together, stopped suddenly, and Ada detected a glance pass between them.

"Do you know," Mr. St. George said, looking up from his newspaper at Sydney, "that it is past twelve o'clock? Let me recommend you to shorten your midnight wanderings. For Ada's sake you ought to avoid incurring the remarks of servants and of anyone else who may know of your rambles in the wood after dark."

Sydney looked angry and was going to speak, but Ada would not give him time.

"Sydney had nothing to do with it," she said, "why should you blame him? I wished to stay out, and Sydney is quite free to stay with me if he likes."

"Well, in your case, I suppose it does not much signify," her uncle said, with one of his smiles. "I merely tell you that it is not usual."

Feeling puzzled and sad Ada went to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE COUNTENANCE OF STERN COMMANDMENT."

SYDNEY looked uncomfortable at breakfast; gave vague answers and did not eat anything. Ada smiled at him once or twice; she knew it was the horrible prospect of that business interview with his father that depressed him, but Sydney did not respond to her smiles, for he was far more uncomfortable than she supposed.

After breakfast Mr. St. George said,

"Come into my study, Sydney, I want to settle accounts with you."

Sydney got up and followed his father; as he passed Ada he stooped down and whispered,

"I feel very much as I did when I was a small boy going to get a flogging!"

"Now, my dear boy," his father began, "I should like you to give me an account of your expenditure at Oxford, and if there are any trifling little bills to be paid [this with an air of great magnanimity] I should like to see them."

Sydney wished his father would not imagine that everything was so smooth.

Mr. St. George had a strange way of giving credit in words to a goodness that did not exist, and believing mentally in a badness which also did not exist. Sydney looked all round the room with a great desire to escape,

and a sort of wonder how he would feel when it was all over. Somewhat pleasanter than he did just then, it was to be hoped. Well, there was nothing for it but to speak out.

"I have been led into a good deal of expense one way or another; a fellow can't keep very well out of it at Oxford."

"A good deal of expense?" Mr. St. George repeated. He was still bland, but his lips were a little tight and severe. "Explain yourself. What do you call a good deal of expense?"

"Oh! a lot of fellows used to come to my rooms, and of course I had to stand breakfasts and wines and a lot of things like that. Then I joined a Tandem Club, and we lost by the horses when they were sold up at the end of term."

"Do you know, Master Sydney, that a man can't be led into expense when he has got no money?"

"I don't understand you." But he understood more than he acknowledged.

"Who do you think is going to pay your debts?"

That was a problem Sydney was not prepared to solve; if he had known of any more promising person than his father, no doubt they would have been paid long ago. Those unanswerable questions are very trying. The habitual bland expression was altogether gone out of his father's face.

"Let me see your bills. I must know the exact amount you are liable for. No equivocation about it: that's the sort of thing I can't bear, and I always find it out."

"I have no gas bills. I owe a good deal to tradesmen in the town, and at the livery stables, besides money I had to borrow from fellows to pay up at the Club."

"In all how much?"

It was horribly quiet, that question; like the moment when you are taking aim before the trigger is drawn!

"About one hundred," he said, lifting his head and waiting for the outburst.

What made it worse to Sydney, was the knowledge that this sum was not all he owed, and that he dared not tell the rest. One can bear a great deal of wrath when one knows it is final, and there will be peace afterwards. His father got up, and his face grew harder and whiter.

"I shall not pay one halfpenny of it. Do you think I have saved, and denied myself every luxury to be beggared by your damned extravagance? You knew what you had to expect of me when you went to College. When I was your age I had not half the allowance you have—not half—and I would not have thought of asking my father for a penny."

All this time Sydney was considering how he could get away from this scene. He had an indistinct notion that his father would have to pay his debts as he was under age, and having told him about them, the next thing was to escape the disagreeableness of listening to his reproaches.

"I dare say I have been a little extravagant, but next term I shall manage better."

"You will have to, I can tell you; I am not going to pay for your whims."

He walked up and down the room as he spoke. Sydney thought he might with advantage take flight, so he got up, and turning to the door, said,

"If you don't want me any more, father, I'll go."

"Yes, I do; listen to me once for all. I'll pay your tradesmen's bills, and you will please to let me have them

at once. The money you've borrowed, not one farthing of it will I pay. If men are such fools as to lend you money, let them suffer for it, and if you run in debt again I'll ship you to sea, or find some other employment for you, that will take the fine gentleman out of you."

It seemed to Sydney that his father had said his worst now, and he could not accept his sentence silently.

"I can't go back to Oxford, owing money to fellows there. It is impossible; no man could be so dishonourable."

"It was dishonourable of you to borrow the money; my paying it would not make *your* conduct any better, and I am not going to do it."

"Then I am not going back to Oxford," Sydney replied with a sort of dogged obstinacy often seen in weak natures.

"Go to the devil if you like," his father said brutally, "or find some way of paying your debts. Why don't you marry your cousin?"

He paused opposite to Sydney as he asked the question, and looked at him searchingly. How unlike were father and son! The face of the latter carelessly soft and weak in every feature; the face of the former, hardened, and his eyes restless and colourless from mean cares and ignoble suspicions.

"I suppose," Sydney answered, half sadly, half contemptuously, "she does not find me very charming."

"I'll tell you why; you have not spirit enough to make her do so—you are like your mother, who was too indolent even to look after her house, and let herself be cheated right and left. You could win Ada to-morrow if you knew how to set about it. Do you think she is different from other women? Are you fool enough to

imagine that you can tell them the truth, and treat them like rational beings? Make love to their caprices, and you do what you like with them."

Sydney was partly indignant at his father's words. Ada was as yet too much above every one, in his mind, to be reckoned with the crowd, but still there was a sort of false shame in him, at believing in goodness or any ideal perfection; which false shame visits all weak souls when they hear subjects that they have deemed sacred, touched on profanely and unbelievably by men of more experience.

"I am willing enough to win Ada," he said, "but I don't see the use of doing it in a deceitful way, and whatever her caprices are, she would find me out if I tried to flatter her."

"You are talking nonsense. I have seen a great deal of the world, and know a good deal more of it than you do. There is no use dealing plainly with women, because they don't understand it, and you must suit yourself to them. What is romance but deception? Making things appear what they are not? And is not romance what women love?"

He paused triumphantly. His voice had softened. He was in one of his winding arguments such as his soul loved, and he felt it must carry conviction to his son's mind. It did not. Sydney had not yet arrived at seeing things in this desirably practical light. Perhaps it was the fault of his youth and foolishness. His father went on after a moment—over-estimating the effect he had produced.

"Don't talk to Ada of marrying yet; make her fall in love with you, that's the point; get her in your power; under your influence.

"If you have any," he added with a sneer.

"You want me to marry her just to get her money, I suppose," Sydney retorted, roused by that little sneer which certainly it was not judicious of Mr. St. George to introduce; "well, I am not such a sneak; why, upon my soul, I would rather ask her for her money and leave her free than win her on false pretences."

His face flushed feverishly. It was a great deal to say in the presence of such a father; a brave bit of truth to bring out in such an atmosphere of shuffling diplomacy, and it was very unwelcome to the listener.

"You fool!" he said, "you talk like a romantic girl in her teens. Pray don't let me hear any more of those yellow-backed-novel sentiments. A man to talk in that high-flown style ought to be a little more self-denying in his habits, or else find the means of indulging his tastes."

Sydney did not reply, and his father raised his voice to its former pitch of coarse anger.

"Marry your cousin and I'll pay your debts for you; but if you are such a fool that you can't make the girl your wife—not one shilling shall you get from me, now or hereafter. I'll pay your shop bills out of your next year's allowance; that's all. Do you understand? If you have got such fine notions, I suppose you can work for them, and not feed them at my expense!"

"I understand perfectly," his son answered, his face reflecting the anger in his father's. "And now I can go."

Without waiting for another word he left the room; he walked along the hall, his eyes flashing, opened the passage door, and banged it after him without thinking, and ran up to his room. He took his gun and cartridges and rushed out. He did not speak to any one, not even

to Ada ; he could not bear to see her just now ; perhaps he would cool down after a day's sport.

Mr. St. George sat down when Sydney left, and took up his newspaper. He grew more angry as he thought of the boy.

"That's what you bring up children for ; you slave for them all your life, and then they take your money and fling it about without a thought of the years of labour you have given to get it together, and they think themselves greatly wronged if you don't stand passively to be robbed by them ; but I am not a fool of a father, and my son will find that he cannot do that with me."

He thought bitterly how everything was going wrong and resisting his will ; nor was there any doubt in his mind that what he willed was the best thing, and that the opposition offered to it was from selfishness and obstinacy. Ada and Sydney would not marry, simply because they desired to oppose his wishes. That girl hated him, and ascribed every sort of base motive to him for his desire that they should marry, and yet any fool could see that it was for their happiness. They would be well off and happy. Ada had fanciful notions of being made much of, and queening it in society where people would flatter her because of her money and good looks ; but he knew the world and how easily her head would be turned, and how much better it was that she should marry early. When she was a wife and a mother, she would see he was right. Opposition to Mr. St. George's plans was mere blindness to the end in view, and a childish self-will, which must have a thing its own way because it is its own way. Results were everything to him. A man who stretched his hands to his neighbour's goods, and was found so doing, was a thief. There

was no such thing as mental dishonesty. The results, the facts, were there to judge by. When they were good, what was there to say? The tricks and cunning used to compass an advantageous end were misnamed; they were only the prudence of an intelligent man—the artifice which is skill. Mr. St. George was a man of an analytic mind, always working with the noxious gases of life to produce some result that would look perfect and complete; incapable of grasping any pure law which must be just and true, no matter how imperfect in its application.

He loved his children, in a certain way. If they had any filial affection, were in fact worth anything, they would see things as he did, and help him in carrying out his views. How was it that Sydney, after all his training, was turning out so badly?

Carelessness about money was viciousness, and carefulness the basis of a good character and position in the world; it led to everything. With money at your command, what good could you not do?

It was his mother's careless disposition breaking out in Sydney, and since he could not be made to see what was best, he must be taught it by necessity. He must be kept down with a strong hand. Perhaps he would give up making a fool of himself, and take the only course open to him.

Sylvia had said something about his wishing to invite a friend from Oxford; well, let him come. Perhaps, thought Mr. St. George with a smile, when the boy sees a rival in the field, it may rouse him to make sure of the prize! Serve him right, the young fool, if he lost her: yet even in his anger, Mr. St. George did not desire this result. The punishment would fall on him-

self in the destruction of his plans; the shattering of that edifice he was erecting, whose foundations were gold.

Notwithstanding the bright promise of the morning, the rain had come down sweepingly; had given delusive signs of ceasing, and at last had settled down into a steady pour.

Ada had driven into Fenton, a distance of about five miles, to buy some things for the house, and coming home the rain dashed in her face, and roused her pony to various little pranks. She did not mind, it seemed rather pleasant to her. She was glad for the sake of the burnt grass and the thirsty crops of turnips that she passed in the fields by the roadside. She was glad for the poor people, who had been forced to draw water from afar. There had been two months of sunshine, and everything under the heavens looked thankful for the bountiful gift of water. From under her dripping umbrella Ada nodded smilingly at the drenched passers-by. She was very young, and even with an ache in her heart which was never quite dead, she had faith in life—faith in happiness—faith in things coming right somehow—faith in people seeing their faults and growing somewhat different.

When she reached home she was soakingly wet but bright. She had had so many hours' immunity from grumblings and fault-findings. She sprang from the little dog-cart and ran into the kitchen to dry herself, and laughed with the servants at the absurd wet figure she was.

"Where is Mr. Sydney?" she asked the old cook as she took off her cloak.

"I saw him go out of the yard this morning with his

gun ; he must be drowned in all this wet, and with his cough too."

It was near dinner hour when Sydney came in. He had tramped through the wet grass and the close underwood ; had blazed away at some unoffending rabbits, who were rash enough to show their white tails as they scuttled round some corner into their burrows : he had missed most of them, but he did not care. He did not care either that the rain had soaked through his tweed suit and thin boots. He was not cold.

"It is probably my bad temper that is keeping me warm," he thought to himself ; but it was fever that warmed him, poor boy ! and gave him an unconquerable desire to walk on and on. At last he felt weak and tired and turned home.

Ada was the first to meet him when he came in.

She laid her hand on his coat sleeve.

"What possessed you to stay out all this time, Sydney ? Do change your clothes at once."

He went up to his room, but instead of changing his clothes he cleaned his gun.

Ada was very uneasy about him, and seeing he did not come down she took him up a glass of wine, and found him still wet and with seemingly little intention of making himself dry.

He laughed at Ada when she scolded him for his imprudence.

"What does it matter, dear ?" he said ; "but if it pleases you, I'll put myself into another suit and be with you in a jiffy."

So with that promise she left him.

CHAPTER V.

A VISITOR.

DISEASE is the most skilful of thieves. We make a fuss about some trifling ailment which only makes our eyes a little dull, and our limbs a little listless, and we never see the approach of a real malady which steals our life away ; which robs our cheeks of their beauty ; sucks the red blood from our heart, and leaves the rifled tenement for Death to tenant. When that which we prize is safe in the clutches of the robber, we raise the hue and cry ; too late !

All through the night Ada could hear Sydney coughing, and though the sound came faintly through the walls, not one cough escaped her sharp, anxious ear ; and it made her restless and unhappy.

Yet a cough was nothing ; he was tall and weak ; he would grow out of it. What did she know of illness, except her father's ; even that she did not know much about. She was very lonely without him ; she missed him always ; she was not forgetful of his death, but he was old, and the old must die ; that is a thing easy to realise, for we see the failing limbs and the tired eyes ; but the young ? Surely it must only be some strange and fearful disease that can kill them ! They cannot be with us day by day with the same interest in our pursuits the same smiles on their faces ; the same jokes (which

are laughed at, though they are worn thread-bare) on their lips—and yet be dying? Impossible. Yet these thoughts clung a little through the quiet night as Ada lay awake, and there was no sound but Sydney's cough, and sometimes, when the wind rose, the swaying of the blind, which made a faint rustle as of some one entering the room.

With the morning sunshine all gloomy thoughts fled away. Was not everything waking up into renewed life and beauty?

Sydney looked the better for his wetting, Ada thought when she saw him at breakfast; his eyes were brighter and he had more colour.

"Sylvia has been telling me," said Mr. St. George to his son, "that you wish to ask some friend of yours here."

"Sylvia is very thoughtful," he answered with a boyish wink which made her very cross. "Yes, I should like to ask Florio; he is a very good fellow."


"I cannot really afford to ask visitors; my means do not allow of it, but if your friend does not mind living in a simple way, you can ask him for a few days."

Mr. St. George always made some trifling concession—with an air of much self-sacrifice,—after having made himself particularly unpleasant, and on these occasions enjoyed all the self congratulatory consciousness of a thoughtful and indulgent father!

"Who is this Flor—Flor—what do you call him? It is not an English name."

"Florio. No, he is an Italian; though you would never think so, as he was born in England and speaks English very well, with only an occasional slip in pronunciation."

"How did you pick him up? Is he in your college?"



"No, one of our fellows introduced me to him, and he has been very civil to me."

"He is a splendid musician, Ada," he added looking across at her.

"Sings or plays?" enquired Sylvia, looking as if she had something condemnatory to say, no matter what the reply.

"He can play several instruments, but he plays the violin best, and he teaches singing at Oxford."

"Oh! he is a singing master then?"

"Yes. Have you any particular objection to that?"

"Those kind of people," said Mr. St. George, "are very useful and agreeable sometimes, Silvy; I don't say to make intimate friends of, but they are pleasant enough."

Mr. St. George liked to meet people in a subordinate position to his own, provided they felt their position. He trusted Mr. Florio was of that kind.

"It is to be hoped," said Sylvia, "that he is a man who can amuse himself. A man who hangs about a house all day, expecting to be entertained, is a dreadful bore."

"Considering that you look upon his coming with so much dread," said Sydney, "you were rather anxious that he should be invited!"

There was always a passage of arms between these two at breakfast.

"Any stranger will be a check on your bad manners, so his coming will be of some advantage."

"Ada, why don't you join in this pleasing conversation?" Sydney said with a laugh.

"Because she cannot take your part and she would not take mine," said Sylvia with some asperity.

"I think you manage to provoke each others always," said Ada, "and I don't fancy that my interference would improve matters."

Mr. St. George had taken up his newspaper and did not join in the squabble, but a due attention to the Stock Exchange and Corn Market news did not prevent him hearing every word. He was usually so silent that they often took no notice of his being present, and as they never listened to anything he said, unless they could not avoid it, they supposed that he did them the same honour.

The love of teasing is deeply rooted in a boy's and man's nature. Sydney tilted his chair on the back legs and looked at Sylvia laughingly.

"I suppose you would like to be married, Sylvia, would you not? Come, the truth—"

"If I liked, I suppose I could have been, but I wonder you ask, knowing from yourself what fools men are."

"Come, Sylvia, had you ever a *bona-fide* proposal?"

"You think I was sure to have accepted if I had?"

"I don't know. I think most girls would marry the first man that asked them."

"I trust you'll find the application of your rule universal."

Poor Sydney! He generally got the worst of it, for Sylvia's tongue was long and sharp, while his had only a schoolboy's flippant readiness. He did not like his sister's last observation; he brought his chair down on its front legs and said with a transparent attempt at indifference,

"I do not expect it. All girls are not quite the same, thanks be to the Lord!"

Then he got up, humming an indefinite tune, and Ada,

sorry that he should feel hurt—as she would have been for any creature on God’s earth—got up and followed him to the window, and asked him if he would not begin his Italian lessons again these holidays.

“This vacation,” he answered, laughing, “do not offend me; I am not a little boy come from school.”

“Yes,” he continued, “I’ll study Italian so long as you do not ask me to poke over Dante, which I never could see the beauty of.”

“It is fearful,” he said in a whisper, “to contemplate encountering the governor in that circle for the misers and spendthrifts, and to think of us giving each other a punch in the head as we pass by!”

Mr. St. George noted that their heads were close together during this speech, and he chuckled a little privately. Sylvia heard them talk about Italian, and thought that Ada’s knowledge of that language might make her more attractive to the coming visitor. She had infinite confidence in herself, however. A girl of Ada’s age was always vapid in conversation; had such unfinished ideas.

She betook herself to the piano; her fingers had grown a little stiff, and when Signor Florio came, she would of course be expected to play.

In due time Signor Florio came. He had written to say that he would not be in England during the partridge shooting, and so would run down for a couple of days at once.

What a pleasurable excitement runs through a country house when a visitor is expected; be the new comer ever so prosaic; even the man of business of the family or some country clergyman!

There are fresh flowers in the sitting-rooms, the

avenue is newly raked, and everything is made to put on its best aspect.

Signor Florio did not arrive till late in the afternoon, and so they did not see him till just before dinner. Ada was late in going to dress, and was running upstairs when she heard a repeated "ahem" on the landing. This was Sydney, who was walking round Sylvia and making several exasperating remarks, such as, "What a howling swell!" "Walk off the grass!" and other vulgarisms, which were called forth by Sylvia's having on a new blue silk dress, of a very fashionable make. Sylvia was at his mercy, for she was waiting for Sydney to carry her down.

"How vulgar you are, Sydney! When will you get over your schoolboy ways?"

This was said more mildly than usual, as if she were as fearful of ruffling her features as she was of ruffling her dress!

"I say, Ada," said Sydney, "won't she take the sight out of his eyes?"

Then he gave a long whistle and looked so irresistibly comical, that Ada burst out laughing. Sylvia looked cross, but as she generally looked that, it was a received idea that her expression was the result of her delicate back, and not of her temper.

"What a tease you are, Sydney," said Ada, "she looks very nice."

Sylvia seemed mollified. Any praise of her appearance was like oil on troubled waters. Ada was holding some white roses in her hand.

"Put these in your hair, Sylvia, will you? Or let me do it."

"If you like, but I hate being over-dressed."

"I don't think natural flowers ever look out of place. Give Sylvia a chair, Sydney, and I'll arrange them here."

So she sat down in the corridor, and Ada placed the roses artistically in her hair. They seemed to come just in the right place, and it pleased Ada to look at them. She wished as she fastened in the last one, that she could have done it lovingly; it would have doubled the pleasure.

"Now you can go down, and I must dress, for I am very late."

As Sydney was stooping to take her up, Signor Florio came out of his room, and Sydney introduced him at once. He glanced from one to the other. From Sylvia—well-dressed, a woman evidently accustomed to be admired, and made much of—to Ada, with her tumbled hair and rather dirty dress; she had been gardening.

"Ah!" thought he, "the rich daughter of the house and the poor cousin."

His eyes rested a moment longer on the "poor cousin." She was pretty to look at. The evening sun came through the skylight over her head and touched the golden-brown of her hair, making it flash here and there; the long straight folds of her unfashionable dress suited the grace of her figure; there were still some white roses in her hands.

Though Signor Florio had looked a second longer at Ada, he spoke to Sylvia, and the former, glad to escape, turned into her room. What a quick, restless look there was in the eyes of their visitor! So Ada thought as she dressed hurriedly and went down.

"Late as usual," her uncle said in his bland tone as he offered her his arm.

Ada was opposite to Florio, for she always resigned the foot of the table to Sydney when he was at home, as the dignity of the position did not weigh against the trouble of carving. Thus placed, she had ample opportunity of observing the Signor, who did not speak much to her. Every new person interested her; men more than women, for sometimes in girls' faces she could find nothing but idle dreams and silly vanities, and there was always more history in men's faces—more reality. Every life was a study; its contending interests and strange springs of action; the same words and deeds which came from such different motives; the same motives which effected such different ends. Ada puzzled her head over it oftentimes, and she had strongly fixed in her mind that the character and life are stamped on face and form, only men are so dulled by indifference and self-concentration that these signs make no impression on them, and are passed by, as ships are passed in a fog, and they know not if they are friends or foes.

A young ardent nature would read heaven and earth at a glance, but the sky is not so near as it looks, and earth tells not its secrets.

Signor Florio interested Ada. There was no apathy, no dull indifference in his face; it was full of keenness and force. This was all Ada learnt from it as yet. She could not see the expression of his mouth as he wore a thick black moustache and beard, which was touched slightly with grey. He was a slender man of moderate height, with a tanned complexion, and eyes strangely light for such hair and skin. His hands—Ada always remarked hands—were well-shaped, but had a look of great strength.

I don't know what it springs from, that perfect ease

of manner that some men have. Their words are always well-chosen and evoke interest ; other men say the same things and we think them a bore. They seem to know what is passing in the minds of those they speak to, and they catch up the thoughts and say the things that just reply to them. Such was Florio's manner. Mr. St. George grew into greater importance in his presence. Mr. Florio seemed a man of the world who knew what was what.

"Yes," he said in reply to something that Florio had said about Oxford, "it seems to me there is more extravagance there now, and less hard work than in my time."

"There is hard work among the working men," he answered in a tone which was not a contradiction, "but they are few compared to the idlers, whose great ambition is—to use a vulgarism—to cut a dash among their fellows, but that desire for show is growing all over the world."

"I agree with you, the present generation is a race of spendthrifts ; what the next will be, God knows."

Leaving that unsolved, Florio turned to Sylvia and talked of the beauty of the place, the glimpses of the mountains from the avenue.

"Nothing seems to have escaped you," she said in her sweetest way ; "I am sure I should never have observed all that."

"Ah ! Miss St. George, you have not lived in town so much as I have. Familiarity breeds contempt of all these beauties. To me, everything in the country is so delightfully fresh, the face of nature and the face of human beings."

Sylvia looked pleased, her eyes sparkled, and Ada remarked a definite change for the better in her manner. She had never seen Sylvia with strangers before, as she

had always gone out alone, and Ada generally disappeared when visitors came.

"I think you underrate our appreciation of the country," said Sylvia. "Does he not?" she added, turning to Ada, and taking her into the conversation with much sweetness.

"We, most of us, think," Ada answered, "that we have a greater power of understanding beauty, a more sensitive eye than the rest of the world."

"Your cousin is a philosopher, I see," said Florio, going on with his conversation to Sylvia, "but contrasts make everything stronger and clearer to us. *You* do not see the sickly white faces in towns, so you never think of the country freshness and bright colour, which is to the face what sun is to a landscape."

Sydney looked amused. The two girls left the room and Sylvia took Ada's arm in quite an affectionate way. Later on in the evening Signor Florio and Sylvia were at the piano. He praised her touch and execution, and gave her a few adroit hints, which, from the interest they showed, evinced his appreciation of her talent. Sylvia grew radiant.

"I say, Ada," said Sydney, leaning over the back of her chair as she sat working, "if Sylvia could always look like that, she would be rather bearable and rather handsome! I wish we could keep a Florio always in stock to make her amiable."

Ada looked up at him and laughed.

"Can't you sit down, Sydney, and not make me break my neck talking to you? There—that's better."

"Let's analyse it, Ada. Is she spoony on him already?"

"Silly boy! How can any one be 'spoony,' as you

call it—by the way I hate that word, it is ugly and idiotic—in a few hours?

"I am not so sure that they can't, and I don't think you know anything about it, but if she is not spoony—oh! I forgot I must not say that,—why does she look so lively?"

"She likes society and shines before strangers I suppose."

"In other words, for show, not for use. Very brilliant, but won't wash! I don't like that sort of thing; do you?"

"I think you are cross to-night, Sydney; you are finding fault with every one."

"Not every one, Ady, but I do feel to-night as if everything was such a humbug. Look at Florio now; he is a very clever, good fellow, and yet what a humbug he is; he has been talking to Sylvia for the last hour, and I don't believe he knows what she is saying. Did you hear him chime in with the governor about extravagance, and he flings money about at Oxford I can tell you."

"Do you like him much? what sort of man is he?"

"Oh! he is a very good fellow; one is never dull with him. He has seen a lot of the world and is uncommonly clever; but why do you want to know?"

"He has a peculiar face; a kind of look that one could not understand unless one knew him a long time."

"Do you expect to understand people? It is not so easy, I can tell you; why I don't understand you and goodness knows I've tried."

Ada laughed.

"Because there is nothing to understand, and you try to imagine that I am a mystery."

The conversation was becoming too personal, and Ada did not like it. She dreaded having to say things that would hurt him. Poor boy! He looked tired and ill, and there was no one to be kind or loving to him but herself.

"Get your violin, Sydney, and play; your friend will accompany you. I have not heard you since you came from Oxford."

"All right. There is no humbug about music, is there Ady?"

"Yes, there is. The true and untrue are in everything, but get your violin and don't discourse any more."

"Florio," he said, when he came back, "would you mind accompanying me? My cousin wants me to play."

Signor Florio was willing, so they began a sonata of Mozart's. Sylvia moved to the sofa now that the interest had drifted away from her. Ada came near and listened, leaning forward, her hands clasping her knees. Sylvia, looking at her, thought what a studied position she was in, and how careful she had been to place herself just where Signor Florio would see her if he looked up from the piano!

CHAPTER VI.

"THE MOON IS UP."

AFTER Ada went upstairs she heard voices beneath her window. It was Sydney and Signor Florio who were smoking and walking up and down. She heard the crunching of the gravel beneath their feet.

The moon was full now and was sailing slowly through a cloudless sky, but there was a damp vapour clinging close to the grass which her rays were too cold to disperse.

Ada blew out her candle. What a puny, contemptible light it seemed! And yet obtrusive enough to make itself important, like a vulgar chatterer in the society of thoughtful men. The sound of the voices, though she did not hear the words, made Ada restless. I don't know why that buzz of talking in the distance irritates one. I think it comes from a feeling that people are sure to say the wrong thing to each other, and we think if we were there we would set it right.

"What a nice spot this is!" said Florio, who seemed in quite an admiring frame of mind to-night.

Sydney was taking faint whiffs at a cigarette. He would never be a smoker; but Florio smoked, and as Mr. St. George never allowed it in the house, they went out, and Sydney was sleepy and cold, and not enjoying it much.

"Yes; it is pretty," he answered, "but it looks rather

ghostly at this hour—a sort of winding-sheet look the moonlight gives.”

“You are bilious, my dear fellow, taking gloomy views. What a lucky dog you are, St. George! What have you to wish for here?”

Nothing we dislike so much when we are very young as to be called “Lucky dogs,” when things are bothering us and we fancy that the whole world is going wrong.

“Perhaps you’ll be kind enough to point out the special delights of my existence.”

“Why, you have a charming sister who evidently believes in you.”

“Oh! very much so,” thought Sydney.

“A jolly country life, with plenty of shooting and sport and a pretty cousin to make love to.”

Here Florio paused and looked sideways at Sydney, who did not speak, but thought, “Damn that fellow, how observant he is!”

“Then,” he continued, “you go away to Oxford and have your fling, and come back to enjoy the quiet still more. What else is there to be desired?”


“It is to be desired that the governor was not such a screw, and would put his hand in his pocket a little more freely.”

“He will do that some day. You know, old fellow, it is just as well *you* have not the Bank of England at your command. I know how rash you can be.”

“Of course you do; but it makes one feel such a rascal not to be able to pay one’s debts.”

Sydney reddened as he spoke, and looked most uncomfortable.

“Now, St. George, you are thinking of that paltry



sum you owe me. Set your mind at rest about that, my dear fellow. I don't want the money just now."

"You are awfully kind, but—"

"Not at all," Florio interrupted, "it is so much money invested at rather a high rate of interest," [Yes, Signor Florio, *rather* high], "and it might as well be with you as in a bank. I wish to goodness I could let you have it free of interest altogether; but, you see, I am only a poor devil of a singing-master, and I must live."

"Of course you must, and I don't believe there is another fellow going who would be half so generous."

Sydney said it very heartily, for Florio had relieved his mind of a great weight, and in the temporary lightness he forgot that it would have to be taken up again and would then be heavier to carry.

"Pooh, pooh! don't let us say any more about it, and take my advice and do not vex yourself about trifles."

Then they walked up and down for a while silently, and Florio lit another cigar.

"What a kind sort of man your father seems!" he said presently.

"I can't say I see it."

"That is because you do not know how to manage him."

"Perhaps you know of a school for the training of sons in the management of fathers."

"Yes; the school of common sense. You can learn most things there. Mr. St. George must be kind. He has adopted your cousin, has he not? You said something of the kind to me."

Sydney burst out laughing. Ada, who heard his laugh, little thought that she was the subject of conversation.

"She has adopted us, that is more like it," he said. This explained a good deal to Signor Florio.

"That sounds so strange, St. George, that it has roused my curiosity. Will it be prying into family affairs to ask what you mean?"

"Not at all," Sydney said readily. He felt expansive towards Florio to-night. "The fact is, this place and everything is my cousin's."

"Oh!" thought Florio, "this calf-love of Master Sydney's is not such a pastoral sort of thing as I fancied. Upon my word, he is more wide awake than I gave him credit for being."

"Her father, Colonel St. George, was very well off and left everything to her; but she is not to be mistress of her property till she is twenty-four, I think, and my father is her guardian and has the management of everything till then."

"And if she marries?"

"If she marries with my father's consent, I believe she inherits her property at once. I think that is it, but I am not very clear about it."

"Well, you know," said Florio, after a little silence, "if you get on well together, and your cousin is a nice girl, it is just the same as if the place were your father's. I dare say she is quite satisfied with all his arrangements."

There was a slight tone of interrogation in the last phrase.

"I don't know; she does not complain. She is not so small-minded as to bother herself about petty details. My father does just as he likes."

"Why don't you marry your cousin? She seems to like you," said Florio, as if he had had a sudden inspiration.

"Do you think so, Florio?" Sydney said warmly, led on by his friend's interest in him.

"Of course I do, and so do you. But lads of your age are always too diffident with women."

Sydney felt that his diffidence or assurance had very little to do with it.

"She is a pretty girl, too," said Florio thoughtfully.

"I think pretty is a stupid sort of word," said Sydney, kicking the gravel as he walked, half ashamed of himself, and yet unable to repress his feelings now that he had begun to speak on the subject.

Florio smiled quietly to himself.

"Lovely sounds like an exaggeration, though, *per Bacco!* it is not so in this case."

"I thought you would admire her. Her mother was an Italian."

"Ah! I was wondering where she got that southern look."

"I thought you scarcely noticed her?" Sydney said, quickly and suspiciously. "You were talking to my sister all the evening."

"Of course I was. Your cousin was talking to you, why should I put in my oar? But I saw her when she sat near the piano. By the way, does she not share your musical taste and talent?"

"She sings splendidly."

"Ah! I thought so, with that throat and those eyes."

Florio's enthusiasm always seemed to check Sydney's.

"I forgot," he said, "that Miss St. George does not care that any one should know she sings; it is a whim of hers. I ought not to have said anything about it."

"Don't look annoyed about it; the secret is perfectly

safe with me ; who do I know that your cousin knows, and why should I take the trouble of repeating it ? ”

This was said in such a tone that Sydney felt a fool for having said it was a secret.

“ I very seldom hear her myself.”

“ Why does she put her light under a bushel ? ”

“ I don’t know. I suppose she is nervous.”

But Signor Florio thought otherwise. Slight as his observation of her had been, from what he had told Sydney, yet he was sure she was not shy ; still it was hard to tell, but he fancied there must be some other reason. He would find out in time.

A naturally acquisitive mind was Signor Florio’s. For what could it signify to him what reason there could be for Ada’s reluctance to sing *pro bono publico* ?

“ What is your cousin’s name ? ”

“ The same as ours, St. George.”

“ Oh ! I don’t mean that. Her Christian name ? ”

Sydney hesitated a second. Somehow he did not like to tell Florio her name, though he scarcely understood his own reluctance. He had been with him in other scenes where not the most delicate language had been used, and where, when women were spoken of, even the most spotless, there was considerable licence of speech. Perhaps that was the reason why Sydney did not wish that Ada’s name should be on Florio’s lips.

A man always thinks that there is in himself—as distinguished from other men—a well of reverence and purity, which they know not.

Florio’s cutting sneers at goodness, and contempt for men and women generally, were very clever and amusing when applied to people for whom Sydney cared nothing, but when he thought of such speech coming near Ada,

it seemed a blighting blast, and by some extraordinary process of reasoning, familiarity with her Christian name seemed to make that more possible! However, it was an absurd notion and of course he could not say he would not tell her name; it was childish, so he answered in a minute,—

“Ada.”

“Ada?” repeated Florio, with what Sydney fancied was a slight start. “Ada, it is a pretty name and suited to its owner.”

What were the memories wakened by that name?

Signor Florio was silent as he walked up and down; his cigar went out and he did not perceive it.

The window just above the hall door opened. It was Ada's room, and Sydney looked up and saw her standing there. She was restless that night; the walls of her room seemed too close to her and the ceiling too low. She had been looking out for a long time, and that did not satisfy her, so she stepped from her window on the top of the porch.

It seemed as though to throw away the beauty of such a night, was to be indifferent to what life might never bring again. To sleep away the hours, and shut out this beauty with bolts and bars, seemed coarse animal dulness. Perhaps on such a night if you could lie down in the grass by some tree, and dreamily watch the clouds pass till your eyes closed, sleep might then be a life in more perfect lands, in companionship with purer souls.

A long cloud floated across the moon, and from time to time she showed her face over the edge and disappeared again—like a child hiding itself for playfulness. Sometimes she would look out with a smile, and all the clouds that flitted across her path caught up a gleam of

her light and dispersed, filling the sky with luminous streaks. Florio threw away his cigar and looked up with animation, when Ada appeared.

"You will catch cold, Ada, in your evening dress," Sydney said; "go in again."

"You have made me restless by talking incessantly under my window, so it is your fault if I catch cold, but I shall not."

The presence of a stranger did not in any way make her constrained in manner. All artificialness seemed for drawing-rooms; here under the heavens there was no need for conventional barriers.

"I am sorry, Miss St. George, that we disturbed you," said Florio.


"I do not regret it, it is so beautiful a night."

"Come down and we shall not smoke. If you take a little walk, you will sleep quite soundly."

"I think I will. Is the drawing-room window open, Sydney?"

"Yes, I believe so, we came out by it, but don't you think it is too late? It is hardly worth while."

"It is always worth while when you want to do a thing, St. George, believe me," said Signor Florio. Ada had left her window, and Sydney went round to meet her. Florio discreetly remained on the walk in front of the house and smiled to himself; it seemed a trick of his. All this puzzled him a little. Did they go out in this romantic manner every night? He thought not; if it were so Miss St. George would not have thought it sentimental to come when there was a third person. Perhaps she was interested in him—Florio; novelty was a great thing with women. He saw them coming now apparently talking earnestly.



"I suppose I shall have to hook it," thought he, "three are not company, but it is infernally awkward to get off the ground gracefully! We'll see."

Sydney had looked a little sulky as Ada came out, so she said to him,—

"You do not want me? I am disturbing your chat with your friend."

"It isn't that," he answered, "but if the governor sees you he'll growl, and if Sylvia sees you she will be spiteful, and it might have been as well if you had not come."

"Never mind," she said laughingly, "as your father generally growls, and Sylvia is generally spiteful, it won't make much difference, and I may as well enjoy this heavenly night."

She took it all so simply that he felt a little ashamed of making a fuss, but she had come on Florio's invitation, not his, and that made him say,

"It would not have mattered perhaps, if we were by ourselves, but with a stranger, he may make remarks, and they [nodding his head towards the house] may make remarks."

"What do I care? You make me feel inclined to stay out all night! Since when have you turned mentor?"

She was annoyed that he should say the smallest word that sounded like lecturing her. Some one else had done so long ago, and she had not minded him, should she listen to Sydney! Why should she not enjoy the summer night? She would have preferred being alone, but she could not say so; and besides, if they were not out, the window would have been barred and she could not have got in again.

They joined Florio.

"I think you are right to come," he said, "just to watch the sky. I don't know how it is, we do not notice the changes much by day. They are marvellously beautiful at night."

Ada did not answer, she was cross still, but Florio's words sounded pleasant.

"Have you ever seen Italy, Miss St. George?"

"Never, but I want to see it; I should like to live there; tell me about it."

"I cannot describe things, I wish I could. I was thinking just now of the summer nights there. I think one should never sleep then, except for an hour in the day, when the glory of the sun is too strong for us mortals. You cannot think how keen the imagination is on those summer nights; how life seems exalted. The most prosaic are lifted into poetry."

Ada had felt a strange repulsion and attraction to Florio; as he talked now, the latter predominated perhaps because his face and its expression was not clear by this light, and his voice was pleasant. They still walked up and down before the house. Ada seemed to defy observation now that Sydney had suggested probable censure.

"I will go to Italy one day," she said, "but it is a long time off."

"I should think you could go now if you liked," said Sydney.

She shook her head.

"Suppose you try and persuade my uncle!"

There was a blind pulled aside at one of the windows, and a face peered out. Florio saw it. He thought he might go now.

"Don't you think it is getting chilly," he said, "that's the worst of your English climate. I think I will go in, if you'll excuse me, Miss St. George."

"Certainly. I think we had all better come, the air is making me sleepy."

"I shall stay till to-morrow morning, if I am bringing you in."

Ada laughed.

"To tell you the truth, if I wished to stay, I would like best to be alone."

"How are we to bear that indifference to our presence, St. George? I think we had better go."

"Yes, and I too," Ada said.

So they went in.

"I think you are right about solitude," Florio said to her in a lower tone as they stepped through the drawing-room window, and he held the curtain back for her. "One cannot talk on a night like this. Felicissima notte, Signora."

CHAPTER VII.

"CAN THE DEVIL SPEAK TRUE?"

SYLVIA was perfectly aware that Ada had been out that night, and the next morning at breakfast she turned to her with apparent concern and said,

"How foolish of you to have been out so late last night, you have not taken cold, I hope?"

Mr. St. George looked up with a surprised and rather shocked expression.

"Not the least," answered Ada, "I slept so soundly afterwards."

Signor Florio was reading his letters and seemed absorbed in them, but he looked up in a minute and said to Sylvia,

"What a pity you could not have come, but it would have been rash, you are so delicate."

"Yes, I have to deny myself pleasures," (with an air of martyrdom). "Besides, I should not have dreamt of disturbing you and Sydney. When gentlemen are having a quiet smoke I think ladies are always in the way."

"If I were to say that they are never in the way, I am afraid you would think it an idle compliment, but really our conversation last night would have been much brighter if you had come."

"Well, to-night perhaps."

"I fear I cannot share your pleasure to-night, as I must leave by this evening's train."

"So soon ! said Sylvia.

"We had hoped for the pleasure of your society for a much longer time," said Mr. St. George stiffly.

Now that he was quite sure that Signor Florio would not stay, he could indulge in a strong feeling of hospitality !

"What's the meaning of this, Florio ?" said Sydney.

"I have had letters which oblige me to go to town."

"You can come back," said Sylvia sweetly, disregarding a warning look from her father.

"I am sorry I cannot. I am going to my native land at once. There is an old friend of mine at Florence who is dangerously ill, and I should like to see him before he dies."

Every one was a little silent after this, to express sympathy with the dying friend ; though they did not care, and Florio did not care either !

After breakfast Florio and Ada happened to be alone together. The former opened the piano and began to play something of Schumann's. Ada came and stood beside him. He only played a few phrases and then broke off.

"You sing, Miss St. George ?" he said in a tone half affirmative, half interrogative.

"I have a voice, I believe," she answered evasively, and turned away, taking up a book.

"You need not tell me that. I see it in the formation of your throat, I hear it when you speak."

For a second Ada had thought that Sydney must have told Florio, but his manner left no doubt but that it was his own discernment that helped him to the discovery.

"You have had lessons ?" he continued.

"A few long ago in Brussels, but I don't sing now; I have given it up."

"I wish I could teach you as far as I am able."

"You are very kind," Ada said in rather a cold way.

"A good voice neglected seems to me such reckless waste. You don't know all you might do with it."

She shrugged her shoulders. It did not signify much to her. She did not feel that her talent could have any growth in uncongenial air.

"Ah, you are at ease and rich, Miss St. George, and you don't think about the power you have, just because you feel that you can exercise it at any moment, but if from physical or moral infirmity every opening for the development of your genius was closed to you, then you would knock at the gates impatiently enough."

"Then it is the impossible that is fascinating?"

"Generally. Will you let me hear your voice?"

Seeing her hesitation he added,—

"Your uncle and his daughter are in the library, I think; no one will hear your performance but myself, and I am a singing master and therefore nobody."

"I never—" she began.

"You never sing here; you don't want to be plagued into singing nightly for people who do not really care for it, and you are quite right; genius is not mechanical—but let me hear you, perhaps you don't know what you are capable of."

"Perhaps," he concluded, laughing, "you have no voice and sing à tirer l'oreille!"

Ada saw no sufficient reason for refusing and yet she did not like it. She felt as if a cold critical judge like Florio would stifle her voice. She was wrong. He

followed her in the accompaniment with such perfect sympathy that she caught power and passion from it somehow, and she sang well. His touch on the piano reminded her of those days the memory of which seemed never to grow faint.

"Your voice," he said, turning round and looking full at her, "is beautiful. It is a perfect organ; wants training, of course; it is not very flexible, but you could do anything with it."

She did not care for his praise, because she did not care to give him pleasure. Sydney's appreciation, though more ignorant, was altogether pleasanter.

"Perhaps I shall be of use to you some day," he added; "I fancy we shall meet again."

Just then Sylvia came in.

"You singing, Ada!" she said with a pretty air of astonishment. "How is it that you have hid your talent from your own family? Are you coming out on the stage some day, and are you reserving it for an admiring public?"

"Signor Florio wished to hear if I had any voice."

"And has the child any voice?" She asked of Florio.

"Yes, she has a good voice," he answered with judicious praise, "but it takes a great deal of hard work to make a good singer. And you, Miss St. George, do you sing?"

"No, I have given all my time to playing."

"You are right, it is hard to do two things really well."

Ada wondered how much his praise of her voice was really worth, when he had words of praise for every one, and yet were they so? There was an unpleasant kind of

uncertainty about this man's way of speaking that irritated Ada.

The evening came and they sped the parting guest; all standing on the hall-door steps, and Mr. St. George expressing a hope (which he trusted would be much deferred!) that Florio would come again.

The household dropped into its usual routine; Sylvia relinquished her finery and grew more complaining, and Mr. St. George told Ada that any little extra delicacy for the table that she had ordered when their visitor was there, must be discontinued, as he could not afford such things.

Ada and Sydney were much together. Instinctively they drew apart from the others. Ada grew fonder of him, more thoughtful of him; for as the summer faded he faded, and the tenderness of her nature was aroused. She spoke to her uncle once about him.

It was one Sunday afternoon when Sydney had been out walking with her. They had been caught in a shower, and on coming in Sydney had alarmed her by a long fit of coughing, which seemed to weary him more than usual.

Ada had been thinking of speaking for some time, but she argued that surely his father must notice that Sydney looked ill, and if it was of consequence would do something. She would perhaps make a ridiculous fuss about nothing, and she scarcely knew why she disliked speaking. However, this evening she walked straight into the library, determined to say something whether it was judicious or not.

Mr. St. George was at his accounts. Ada wondered what he could have to put down and add up perpetually in that book.

"Have you anything to say to me, my dear niece?" he said, in what he meant to be a sweet and encouraging tone, but it did not pass with Ada for what it was intended.

"Don't you think," she said, rushing at the subject, "that Sydney's cough has been going on for a long time?"

"His cough?" he answered quickly; "I did not notice it, you see I have so many things to think about. Has he had it long?"

"Since he came back from Oxford, and it seems to get worse. Ought he not to see a doctor? He looks ill."

"It is only a cold, I fancy; you know how a cold clings in summer."

"But it might be better to see a doctor."

"Pooh—a most needless expense; those rascals think nothing of pocketing their guinea when their attendance is quite unnecessary, and if you are not really ill, they invent an illness for you."

Made angry by his indifference, Ada said warmly, "I am sure a guinea is nothing when any one is ill; I would pay it willingly. I am sure my father did not leave us so badly off that we cannot afford that."

Mr. St. George looked up quickly, and shot a long and unpleasant glance at Ada.

"You need not blame me. I am not indifferent to the boy. I have always been an attentive and affectionate father. I wish you had not broached the subject, as I can only say what will pain you."

"Don't be afraid of paining me," she said quickly, "what is it?"

She suddenly thought that her uncle knew Sydney was dying and hid it from her because nothing could be

done. How precious his life seemed in that moment of waiting for her uncle's reply.

"The boy is unhappy. Don't you see it? I have noticed it this long time, but why should I annoy you by mentioning it?"

Mr. St. George felt himself truly forbearing and self-sacrificing, as he spoke.

"I thought," he added, "that you would see it yourself in time."

Ada felt very puzzled and angry. What did he mean and why did he look at her in that half-sneering, half-triumphant way? The boy might be disappointed about her, but that would not make him ill; besides, he did not talk to her lately in the same way; he seemed to be growing contented that they should be as brother and sister.

"What do you mean, uncle?" she said in her impetuous way, "I hate half explanations."

"You are not as quick as usual to-day, or do you want me to suppose that you are ignorant of the boy being in love with you?"

To discuss that subject with her uncle seemed altogether impossible; she shrank from speaking of it, and her voice was low and unsteady as she answered,

"Sydney, at one time, was foolish about me; that is, he cared for me more than as a mere cousin, but I showed him how useless it was, and I trust he understands it. At any rate," she said more firmly, "I think it is quite wrong to discuss his feelings in this way, and I won't do it."

"As you like; it is painful to me—very—but you spoke of Sydney yourself and asked me to be frank; my guess is not liked I see,—I shall say no more."

Mr. St. George was most irritating. Could she never induce him to speak in any other way?

"I asked you to be frank about his health," she said hotly. She found she could not spare herself, she must speak very plainly. Her uncle was a man to wring from her the strongest words, and not accept any that were less forcible or less painful. "My having refused to marry Sydney could not make him ill, could not give him a cough, and you have said so merely to make me feel uncomfortable."

"You are utterly unjust in your suspicions as you always are. What is the object of making you uncomfortable. Did I ever urge you to marry Sydney? Would I not have spared you to-day, but you insisted."

Ada was going to speak, but he waved his hand to silence her.

"You are quite a child, you don't understand things. When a lad of Sydney's age falls in love with any one it is altogether a more serious thing than if he were older. It preys upon his mind; he takes no interest in things; he is careless of his health; does not see the mischief he is doing himself, and goes to the devil physically and morally! What can I do? Physic won't cure him. I have had consideration for your feelings, I have always tried as far as possible to act kindly and justly and to realise the position of others."

Mr. St. George's moral standard you see was most elevated.

Ada felt dumb. You know the wretched helpless feeling it gives one, when your opponent's statements are all tinged with falsehood or exaggeration, and yet are clothed in such words that they have a covering of truth impossible to shake off from them. What reasonable con-

tradition, what argument had she to offer? Nothing was left but unsupported assertion; she took refuge in that.

"It can't be true, uncle," she said indignantly, "and it is not natural that you should consider my feelings more than your son's if you thought it would do any good to speak to me. Sydney and I are very happy together. I do not wish to marry him, but I am very fond of him and I don't believe he is at all miserable."

She felt when she had spoken that all this had no weight at all, and that she might as well have been silent.

"My dear niece," Mr. St. George said in his calm way, with a smile, "you must keep your opinion I suppose—you generally do. I wish I could change mine, but unfortunately a father's eye sees things too plainly; you will come to see it some day perhaps, and will acknowledge that I was right."

It sounded like a horrible prophecy, and Ada thought her uncle looked as if he would like it to come true.

"Then you won't ask a doctor to see Sydney?"

"He can do as he likes, I have no objection. I do not believe in doctors myself, they only alarm people unnecessarily. The boy will get on all right I dare say; my affection may have exaggerated things a little, but you have become uneasy yourself."

Ada walked restlessly to the other side of the table. It seemed so useless all that she had said. Would no words come to her to give vent to all she felt?

Her uncle had returned to his accounts with a distressed look on his face, unable to express, "I suffer, but I have my duties to fulfil."

What was there to do? Must she accept the verdict that she was making Sydney miserable and ill? Her uncle spoke no another word and Ada left the room.

She went straight to Sydney. She wanted to say something to him but did not know what to say. That longing for action when there is nothing to do, that stretching of the hands when there is nothing to grasp—that mental straining of the sight when there is nothing on the horizon of hope—it is horrible.

CHAPTER VIII.

"PITY SWELLS THE TIDE OF LOVE."

SYDNEY was sitting at the writing-table in the drawing-room, with a letter just begun before him. He looked up brightly, as he always did, when Ada came in, but his face changed when he saw hers. Something was wrong. She did not mean that he should see that she was agitated, but she came too quickly from her uncle, and there was a flush on her cheek, a half-angry, half-sad light in her eyes.

"What's the row, Ady?" he asked, jumping to his feet and putting a chair besides his for her.

"Nothing. I am cross, that is all."

"What is it? A tiff with the governor or a moral scratch from Sylvia? Never mind them."

"Will you answer me a question, Sydney?"

"Let's hear it first."

"Are you vexed or bothered about anything?"

He coloured; he thought of his debts.

"What makes you think of that? Did my father tell you to pump me?"

She looked indignant.

"If he did, you don't suppose I would?"

"I beg your pardon, I know you would not, but I was wondering what you meant."

They both had a different idea in their heads, so it was not easy for them to understand one another.

"You and I are very happy, are we not? You are not worrying yourself about anything, are you?"

"I don't know what you are at. I suppose I have bothers as well as other fellows."

"Your father has been telling me that you are unhappy and that is the reason you look ill. What is the matter, Sydney? Tell me."

She looked appealingly at him and laid her hand on his shoulder. She could not bear that any harm should come to him through her. She wanted to assure herself that her uncle was wrong in what he had said.

A kind of gleam swept over the boy's face and settled in his eyes, which made her take her hand from his shoulder and lean on the table. She was an ignorant child, and knew not how slight a touch may break the calm and rouse the passions in a man's breast.

"You darling!" he said swiftly, "we are happy, of course, but we might be so much happier."

She seemed to say all wrong things to-day, and to make things worse at every step. She was losing patience.

"Sydney," she said petulantly, "don't be silly. What is the good of talking in that way?"

"Well," he said, checked quickly, as a sensitive boy can be by a woman who is indifferent to him, "I do not understand you. I do not suppose it is amusing to care for some one who does not care a straw for you. Perhaps you'll find that out some day. But why should my father trouble his head about me? I am not ill, and if I were, what's the odds?"

"It matters a great deal."

Then Ada sat silent with her hands clasped, and quite a dull, vacant feeling in her head.

Presently Sydney said,

"I am bothered about my debts if you would like to know; only you need not say so to the governor."

"Have you spoken to him?"

It was quite a relief to Ada to hear of some tangible vexation other than his disappointed love for her. Perhaps she might be of use to him.

"Spoken to him? Yes, but he will see me very far indeed before he'll pay them."

"How much do you owe?"

"About double what I told my father; but as he will not pay the half, it is a logical conclusion that he will not pay the whole!"

"Can't I help you?"

"You, Ady! How can you? Your little pin-money is only enough to buy frocks for you."

He laughed at her gently. He could not be angry with her, or hurt at her words for long. If she would not let him be a lover to her, at least their old fond fellowship could not be broken.

"Will you tell me your difficulties? Perhaps I could think of something—could be of use in some way, though I am only a girl."

"Certainly, I'll tell you if you like, though it won't do much good. I owe about two hundred pounds, and not one penny of it can I pay!"

Ada opened her eyes wide in astonishment. It sounded so much to her, that she marvelled exceedingly how he could have spent it, but it did not seem much use to inquire. Some people have an irritating way of saying, "but why did you do it?" Ada had none of those stupid ways.

"Have you told your father, and does he really refuse to help you?"

"I have told him that I owe one hundred, but he will not pay any of it except tradesmen's bills."

"And the rest?"

"Is owed to Florio."

This surprised Ada still more, for in her ignorance she never supposed that men borrowed money from one another unless when in absolute need, and then painfully and reluctantly. She understood the unpleasantness of Sydney's position at once.

"It must be most uncomfortable for you, Sydney," she said. "No wonder you are annoyed about it. Of course a gentleman can't insist on payment like a shopkeeper, and that makes it so much worse."

"He can insist if he likes, but Florio is so kind that he won't, and that makes me more ashamed of myself."

Ada was silent; she was pondering over what could be done. Her own income would not be much use, as it did not come to more than sixty pounds a year, and of course she must spend some of it. Perhaps she could save and pay it at last, but years of waiting and being uncomfortable about it was out of the question.

"I think it is a damned shame of my father!" Sydney burst out. "Of course I know I made a perfect fool of myself at Oxford, but every fellow does the same [a strong argument in the youthful mind!], and it is a good deal better than being a screw; but the governor compounds for sins he is inclined to, by damning those he has no mind to."

"Perhaps he only made a fuss to frighten you from future extravagance, and he will pay your debts after a while."

Sydney laughed, and tossed up his head in a contemptuous way.

"You would not say that if you had heard him. He was not going to save money to be beggared by me; he would ship me to sea if I ran into debt again, etc. I am almost sure Florio could make him pay if he chose, as I am under age; but he won't; I think he would rather lose his money altogether than do that."

"I wish I were twenty-four, I would pay him then."

"You generous-hearted old thing," he said playfully, "I think when you do come into your property, you will speedily reduce it. Well, it is better than my father's failing."

"But would that do?"

"I hope to do something for myself by that time, Ada; that is to say, if my father gives me the means to go into any profession, but he does not consult me on the subject; he sometimes alludes to the Church still, but I am blown if I would not rather break stones on the road! Fancy visiting the poor and sick, and going into beastly holes where you can't breathe; besides, what good could I do them? I should only feel inclined to tell them, wash yourselves, and again wash yourselves, and yet again wash yourselves!"

"They would not see the force of that," Ada said, laughing. "They would think it so uncomfortable to be clean. But," she added, "we are wandering away from the consideration of how the money is to be paid."

"What is the good of thinking of it? bah!"—and he took a letter that lay before him and tore it up. "I was going to write to Florio and tell him I had no prospect of paying him yet, and would he mind waiting, but I really can't. I'll not write yet; I'll leave things to chance."

"But that won't mend matters; surely something can be arranged."

Ada had that impatient desire to set things straight, and that belief in the possibility of doing so, which belongs to impulsive, sanguine natures. She looked worried and puzzled, and her smooth brow was knitted and her eyes very earnest.

"You look solemn enough to have the control of the Finance Department of England, Ady! Don't bother yourself, dear." He sent a reel of cotton spinning into the air and caught it again. "Besides, it is not so very bad; of course I pay Florio interest, or, at least, I don't pay it, but it goes on, on the principle of accumulative interest, which you will find is a very *interesting* study whenever you have to pay it! Was not that a werry good pun, Ady?"

She did not give any attention to his pun; it was all serious business to her.

"By that arrangement, Sydney, the sum you owe grows larger and larger?"

"Precisely so, my dear girl, but it is only fair. If you keep a fellow out of his money, you must make it up to him in some way.

"Then Signor Florio is not a loser by lending you money?"

"That depends on two things—whether I live to pay or whether he lives to receive it."

Ada would think still more of it by-and-by; at present there seemed no way out of the difficulty.

"Now, my nice little cousin," said Sydney in a coaxing way, "tell me what made you so grave when you came into the room, and what the governor has been jawing about?"

"Yes, on two conditions."

A woman always has some little condition attached to her concessions.

"Name them; and if not beneath my exalted soul to accept, all serene."

"One I'll tell you now; but the other I must trust you'll do, and I will tell you afterwards."

"Which places number two out of the list of conditions at once; stoopid!"

"One is, that when I tell you my conversation with my uncle, you will not say things that will make me say things that you do not like. You know what I mean?"

He knew very well, but he did not speak, and he was not laughing now.

"You will not," she continued, "talk about impossible things, and then grow angry with me because I cannot see everything as you do? Do you understand me?"

She was flushed and looked distressed.

"You need not explain any more. I can't promise, but I will try."

"My conversation with your father arose in this way. I thought you were looking ill, and I was cross because no one seemed to care; so I asked him, did he not perceive it, and ought you not to take more care of yourself; but he only sneered or laughed, and said something disagreeable, so I grew crosser, and said many things, some of them too appropriate—it is a mistake to say appropriate things—and then he grew suddenly solemn, and said it was all my fault; that I made you unhappy, and therefore ill, etc.; and that it was from the utmost consideration to me that he appeared not to notice it."

She paused and looked earnestly at Sydney, but he did not answer. She said hurriedly,

"He made me feel most cruel and wicked ; but it is not true, is it ?"

Sydney saw at once his father's plan, and had the utmost contempt for his mean way of working on Ada's feelings ; at the same time he had pity for himself, and an unwillingness to make light of his own trouble. Of course he was suffering, and he did not quite see the total injustice of saying that Ada was the cause. Under these complex feelings he spoke,—

"I told you I was quite well, Ada ; you need not think about that ; but how can you expect me to refrain from saying things you may not like to hear when you ask me such questions ? I am not a weak girl to be made ill by being bothered. I am not particularly jolly, I dare say, but when you are quite indifferent to me, and all this long time that I've cared for you makes no change, why should you allude to the subject at all ?"

She did not tell him that he had led to this himself. She was too generous for petty retort.

"I cannot marry you, Sydney, because it would seem to me a sin to do so if I was not quite sure that I loved you perfectly."

"You have been shut up here," he said impatiently, "and just because I am the only man who cares for you, and my love is there for you to take when you like, you despise it, and have ridiculous notions in your head that if you lived in society and saw other men, you might find some one who would love you better, and whom you would exalt into a god !"

There was some worldly truth in what he said, and it might have been applied to many women.

"Don't I know," he continued, "when I met beautiful women at Oxford, how fascinating I thought them ? but I

see now how worthless were their fascinations, and you are still the only one I care to win."

When Sydney spoke in this way, he was further away from Ada, and what he desired seemed more impossible than ever; when he was boyish and cousinly he was nearer her heart. Still she was softened towards him to-day, and she threw herself as much as possible into his mood; for every day his look of delicacy appealed to her tenderness more and more, and if he were not a very fine or perfect character, still he was a lovable boy. If in an ugly barren land, there is one glimpse of beauty, and if there is one window in your cottage where your eye can rest upon it, do you not come there often, till most of your days are passed in that nook, your reading or writing taken there, where it can best progress? Life needs love and beauty as the flower needs sunshine.

"Well, Sydney, perhaps I shall feel that some day, who can tell? I don't think I shall find men fascinating—I don't think at all about them really; but wait till I am twenty-four. Would you not prize me more if I chose you in preference to others, than if I married you merely because I never saw any one else?"

"Not a bit. If we were married I don't suppose you would care for any one else, and so long as I had all your love, what does it matter?"

"Yes, so long as you had, but I am not at all sure that I should not care for some one else."

"What, after you were married? What strange notions you have, Ada!"

"I don't think any tie, however legal and strong, can control one's heart. It is only when the heart is so entirely filled with one love that there is no place for another, that such feeling is unalterable. Of course a

man or woman can do their duty as wife or husband conscientiously, but what a lifeless sort of thing that would be."

"It is funny to hear a girl say those things, but there is some truth in it, I fancy."

"It is all truth, Sydney," she said warmly, her eyes growing deep and lustrous with earnestness, "only people do not think about those things. They accept everything, and are nothing but machines. They are too cowardly to look into life and say what they think, because they fear what will be thought of them."

"But, Ady, look at the multitude of men and women that marry and are very happy, though I dare say the women were not very much in love when they married."

He liked to keep the conversation within personal bounds, even if he brought it back there in a limping manner. Of what interest to him were wide generalities? Now that Ada was on this topic, why should they not try to understand each other.

"How can you know that they are happy? and what they might have been capable of if they had struggled for the greatest good, and had not been content with that which was most easy to them? Fate is kind to us sometimes, it is true, and blinds our eyes and we cannot see what we've lost and what we are."

Perhaps these grave considerations may seem strange in a young girl's mind, but the southern nature ripens early; and also since she had been a child, Ada had heard many subjects discussed, which, though they were then not quite understood by her, gave her glimpses into more developed minds, which are generally shut out from girls as long as possible.

What compels thought, in a mind of any depth, more

than a secret trouble and a life quite separated from all sympathy? Sydney did not understand Ada; he admired her in that surprised way that boys do when they meet a woman who has bold thoughts, and is something more than a pretty thing to look at, with graceful accomplishments and submissive ways, but he wished that she had been more like every one, for her being so would make it possible for her to give him the love he wanted.

When we desire to be drawn closer to any one we love, few of us have reverence enough not to wish that the approach should be from their side to us, but that we should be lifted into the sphere of their consciousness.

"I wish you would not puzzle your dear little head with those deep questions; so long as we enjoy ourselves that is the chief thing. I am a utilitarian, Ady."

Ada saw that her words did not mean much to Sydney, their thoughts flowed in such different channels. Of what use was it to pursue the topic?

"That's a big word!" she said laughing. "I tell you what I wish you were,—a strong man. Now for the other request I have to make."

"What is it? That I should be very steady at Oxford if I ever go back—not spend any money, and not fall in love with any one?"

Ada felt tempted to tell him that she would be very glad if he did the latter, but she refrained.

"No, I want you to see a doctor."

Sydney burst out laughing, and his laugh ended in a fit of coughing.

"What crocks and molly-coddles you women are!" he said as soon as he could speak. "Why should I go to a doctor? My cough will go as soon as the warm weather goes, the heat is so confoundedly relaxing."

"You'll acknowledge it is tiresome to cough perpetually?"

"I should think so, it does a fellow up dreadfully." And as he spoke he leaned his head back, and all the colour died out of his face and left him very pale, almost ashen in complexion.

"Then, why not get rid of it? I dare say you would soon get well if you only did what is right."

Her heart belied her words as she spoke. Health and strength seemed very far away from him, they would scarcely come at a beck.

It pleased Sydney that Ada should be anxious about him in any way, and boy-like, he thought he would take advantage of it and tease her a little.

"Let us make a bargain, Ady; if I go to the doctor and he orders me any horrible mess, you shall administer each dose, and give me a kiss after to make up!"

"I wish you would not be so silly, Sydney; I am quite in earnest, and you are very unkind to turn it off in that idiotic way."

"It would not be an idiotic way at all, if you would do it."

"Would you care for my kisses if I were so ready to give them?" she said angrily, and feeling that he must be convinced and ashamed.

"You are always so serious about things, Ady, why should one not have a little joke? But if you are gravely inclined, then I say in all earnestness that any way I got your kisses I would care for them—there!"

She blushed at his words, for there was a growing strength in them, which touched her and made her very sad.

"I won't tease you any more," he added after a

minute. "Do you wish me very much to go to some old fool of a doctor?"

"Yes, I do. I am tired of your barking" [with an attempt at a playful smile].

"Well, I'll try to manage it. I must go up to town some day to order a suit of clothes at my tailor's; I shall go to some man and get my chest stethoscoped all over, to please you."

"And get any prescription he gives you made up and take it?"

"Yes. Now are you satisfied?"

A fortnight passed before Sydney went to London, during which time he grew worse, and his breathing seemed more of an effort; at least it seemed so to Ada, but perhaps it was her imagination.

The weather had changed when he left; there was a cold north-east wind and much rain. Mr. St. George went to town also. He had asked Sydney if he meant to go to the doctor, and when Sydney told him that he was going at Ada's request, he made no demur, but said he would take him to a very clever man, whom he had known for some time. This man had been under some obligation to Mr. St. George, and an interview with him could be conducted on a strictly economical principle. He did not think it necessary to give these particulars about his very clever friend to Sydney. What did it signify, all doctors were alike, and none of them knew much. So they left for London at last.

In spite of Mr. St. George's irritated assertion, when in the train, as he turned over his change in his hand, that this was the most expensive line in England, and that it was disgraceful the way in which railway companies robbed the public—he was in good spirits, and

from Ada's anxiety about Sydney augured well for his plans. He would see them married yet. It would be just as well if the doctor drew a long face about the boy, it would frighten Ada.

These fatherly and altogether kind and just feelings gave Mr. St. George much self-satisfaction, and made the rest of the world look selfish and hard-hearted. We see ourselves in others' eyes.


CHAPTER IX.

"SHE WAS HIS LIFE."

MR. ST. GEORGE and Sydney were to stay three days in London. Ada did not hear from them while they were away. Sylvia had a letter, the contents of which she did not communicate to her cousin, but Ada observed that she was more snappish than usual after it came. The day they were to return was the annual one for laying in coals at Oaklands. It was an old custom that the tenants should draw them and that they should have a big dinner afterwards. It was always a busy, cheerful day. The continued roll of carts on the back avenue, the voices and laughter of the men, though not very musical, gave life to the place. Ada had to think of their dinner and see that there was enough of everything, and it amused her. Sometimes she went down and spoke to them, and shook hands with some of the old men whose faces she had seen for many years. She used to do so when her father lived, but not now.

Mr. St. George and Sydney were not expected till the evening. The tenants had all departed more or less excited from their libations, and Ada went out to walk round the woods. She felt unusually bright, pleasantly looking forward and hoping for good news of Sydney's health.

The breeze tossed the boughs about and swept over



the quivering grass with a careless, laughing strength. It was like a frank, buoyant soul, who recognised no trouble in the world. Ada shared Nature's moods, and it seemed to her to-day that everything would be brighter and happier than before.

Mr. St. George and Sydney had arrived when she returned to the house. She called Sydney, but he was dressing for dinner, and she did not see him till then.

He looked very ill and as if he had grown thinner in those few days, though surely that was not possible.

"I am glad to get away from London, Ada," he said. "I call it a beastly hole. Nasty cold winds round the corners of the streets, and such a row all night that it was impossible to sleep a wink."

Ada wanted to ask him what the doctor had said; but they were all there, and somehow she did not feel inclined to do so before the rest. Mr. St. George and Sylvia were very silent throughout dinner, and looked at her, Ada fancied, with a little added severity of expression.

"You are all very dull," Sydney said near the close of this so-called social meal, "what have you girls been doing since we left?"

Ada reminded them that it had been coal day, and tried to give an amusing description of the intoxicated departure of some of the men; but it was not funny, for she did it badly. The bright, hopeful feelings that she had experienced in the woods were dying away under the influence of cold faces, whose expressions she did not quite understand. Mr. St. George asked sharply how much beer the men had drunk, and, Ada not being able to satisfy him, he became again silent. As they were leaving the dining-room Sydney whispered,

"You have not asked me what the pill-box said to me. Much you care."

"I wanted to ask you alone. I thought you might tell me more."

"Well, come into the conservatory and have a chat."

She was just going to answer when she caught her uncle's eye, and he made a motion with his hand to beckon her to follow him. She was quick enough to take the hint.

"I will, in a few minutes," she answered. "You can go and have a smoke. I'll be with you then."

"All right," he said; "don't be long."

She turned down the hall and followed her uncle into the library. He shut the door behind them in a deliberate sort of way, and told Ada to sit down. He had not his usual bland smile on his face. Ada's heart sank, she knew not why. Then Mr. St. George pulled up the blind and looked out for a minute on the coming night.

"You wanted to speak to me, uncle."

"You wish to hear Dr. Wintrop's opinion of Sydney, do you not? And I think the sooner you hear it the better."

He had thought much of this interview on his way from town, therefore his manner was more studied than usual.

"I do. It is not bad, is it? He does not think him very ill?"

"There is no thinking about it. Your cousin is seriously, dangerously ill."

Here he began to walk up and down the room.

Ada rose also.

"But if he does what is right? If he takes care, he will get well. He is so young."

Mr. St. George did not answer, and Ada went up to him and laid her hand on his arm.

"You are not really frightened about him, are you?" she added.

In that moment she felt very sorry for her uncle. There seemed, for the first time, to be sympathy between them. His distressed look, his fatherly grief and anxiety (how much was real and how much feigned Ada could not distinguish), made him so sacred in her eyes that even, in that brief moment, she remembered with some swift self-reproach how she hated him and despised him.

"My dear niece," he began, holding her hand for an instant, and then leading her to a chair, "excuse my emotion, but you cannot understand the feelings of a parent—a father's anxiety about an only son."

Somehow this announcement of his grief rather checked Ada's sympathy for him.

"I will give you," he continued, "the particulars of our visit to the doctor."

Why could he not come to the point at once, thought Ada, this prosiness was maddening.

"We went there, the first thing on our arrival, and he examined Sydney thoroughly. He questioned the boy very closely, and said that he was decidedly very unwell and must be extremely careful to follow all his directions. I observed that Doctor Wintrop looked very grave when he sounded his chest, so I said to Sydney, just go into the other room and wait for me, I want to get a word of advice for myself from our friend; so he went and I asked the doctor to tell me, as frankly as a doctor can, what he thought of the boy. He hesitated a little, and then asked me suddenly, 'Has the lad anything on his mind?'

Is he troubled about anything?' What could I say? You must be frank with a doctor. I told him what I thought. [Ada did not need to ask what that was.] 'Ah!' he answered, 'that is just it; your son has no vitality, no spring of life and spirits to throw off disease, and it is unnatural in one so young. We doctors don't think that grief kills, but it enervates and lets disease take root.' I saw the truth of what he said, though doctors are mostly fools, and then I pressed him to tell me plainly his opinion of Sydney. 'My dear sir,' he said, 'it is always painful to have to tell bad news, but we are forced to do it sometimes—your son is in a very dangerous state.' "

Mr. St. George paused and looked at Ada. Her eyes had a strained look of attention and dread. She did not attempt to speak, she seemed to wait to hear the worst. Finding that her uncle did not continue, she said,

"But something can be done? It is not hopeless, he can be cured."


This was more an assertion than a question, but there was a strange huskiness in her throat, and a sort of mental paralysis over her.

"There is hope, I trust, but the realization of that hope rests with you."

"With me! Oh! no."

The last two words were almost in an accent of despair, as if she would push away from her some dreadful difficulty that she had no strength to grapple with.

"With you," he said again, as if to give weight to his words by repetition. "You will see it yourself when I tell you more. Dr. Wintrop spoke very sensibly when I told him that Sydney was unhappy from disappointed



affection. 'We old fogies,' he said, 'are apt to think love is nothing and will be got over, but every day in our profession we are obliged to confess that its effects are not slight. It takes hold of a man of your son's age, when the mind and body is in its most susceptible and delicate state. If he were older it would not have the same effect, because there is more toughness and more scepticism about an older man; he sees that the world is not made of the same stuff as his dreams, and he does not fret at the discovery.' I asked him what was to be done. 'We must use all the means in our power,' he answered; 'he may outgrow it.' Then he wrote a prescription and gave me his orders, but as he handed me the former, he said, 'Frankly, the prescription I would recommend, and which would be almost sure to cure him, is that he should marry the young lady he is in love with, and that they should go abroad for two years—say to Italy in the winter, and somewhere in the mountains in the summer. I'll venture to say your son will recover. Young people must be happy to be healthy; I find it so.'"

All this was substantially true, except that the suggestion of Sydney being unhappy came from Mr. St. George in the first instance, and perhaps, too, Mr. St. George's words were a little more definite than those spoken to him. It was natural that a father should be slightly carried away by his feelings, and use more forcible language.

Ada sat aghast. It seemed as if all her bright hopes were changed to visions of disease and death; even as familiar objects change in dim light to objects of terror. Poor child! She felt as if she would escape anywhere, out of the world, to shake off the dread that was over her. At last grasping at the only thing that seemed to present itself, she said,

"He must go abroad at once ; we must all go."

Her uncle shook his head,

"Even if it would do any good, I cannot afford it."

"Cannot afford it !" she said, and her voice was raised, and even to herself, sounded unnatural. "Surely I have money ! Take it and spend it ; what does it matter ? I give it with all my heart."

Her uncle smiled.

"You know very little of business matters, my dear. Your money is not yours to give, nor mine to take. You have no power over it till you are twenty-four."

"Then," she said rather gladly, as if relieved, "my marrying Sydney would make no difference."

"You forget," he said quietly, "that by your father's will, if you marry with my consent, you will be in immediate possession of your property."

Ada's thoughts seemed to move round and round in a prison, from which there was no outlet.

"You could borrow money," she said at last in a helpless way.

"I never borrow."

Then he added in an impatient tone,


"But you don't seem to understand, that even if I could get money to go abroad that would not save Sydney. You will not see that your obstinacy and coldness are killing him ; that—"

Here he checked himself.

"You will excuse me ; my love for my son makes me speak the truth at the risk of paining you."

Something in his words or tone roused her. Her eyes flashed.

"And you would have me marry Sydney to save his life ? Marry him without love, which would be a moral



death to us both ! What would be the good of it ? It would be far better to die ! ”

“ Don’t speak in that violent way ; I don’t ask you to marry Sydney, I tell you what the facts are ; it would be wicked to conceal them. This wonderful love that you dream of, may never come to you in your life. You are the best judge whether it is noblest to sacrifice your own fantastical notions to save a life, or *vice versâ*.”

His voice was very flat and cruel in its tone. He paused to see how she received this ; but as she did not answer, he supposed it had had some effect. He went on : “ I am very much older than you, I have more experience.”

Old people always weight their speeches thus.

“ These high-flown notions die out when women are older, I have always seen it so ; they see how silly they are, and that the world is not guided at all by these ideas. If you were to marry Sydney you would be performing a duty, which ought to be happiness to one of your conscientious nature.” He paused an instant, then added,—“ You would try to love him and make him happy, and afterwards if you could not, you could not ; it would be no sin of yours.”

The lurking iniquity in these words did not reach Ada, but she was puzzled and sad.

“ I don’t understand. If I do not make Sydney happy, what am I to marry him for ? ”

“ You would at first ; it would be a long time before he discovered that you were unsuited to each other. Then he would be older, and have more strength of character ; he would know more of the world, and you could each be very free of one another. Sydney would never be a tyrant.”

Something of his meaning penetrated to Ada's innocent mind, for she was one of those women whose quick perceptions supply the place of all positive knowledge of good and evil.

"If I understand you rightly, uncle," she answered indignantly, "you mean me to have no principles at all, but simply to accommodate myself to the feeling of the moment, and do anything that makes life easier?"

"Not at all, not at all; every one has his own principles, but they do not always fit with the world's; one must strike a balance somewhere. Many things that are done, if submitted to public judgment, would sound terrible, but they are not terrible if we look into them. That you should be out alone, late at night with Sydney, or again, that you should seek opportunities of talking to a man who is a mere stranger to you, at unusual hours, would condemn you in the eyes of the world and make malicious people give you ugly names, which I have no doubt would be quite undeserved. These trivial things are examples."

An altogether low standard of action as the basis of every one's life Ada could not accept or think of as universal.

"One ought to hold to what one thinks right, in spite of the world, in spite of every one."

She felt she must assert this, whether her own life were to be in accordance with it or not.

"I think we have wandered wide of the mark," said Mr. St. George, "we have slipped past one another, and are talking at random. I need not detain you any longer; I think Sydney is waiting for you; but before you go, I must repeat these things that there may be no mistake in your mind. You are willing to listen?"

"Perfectly."

She felt now as if she wanted to hear all he could say on the subject, as if she wanted to take it all in, so that no part of the sadness or helplessness of the case might lie hidden.

"I cannot afford to take you all abroad, it is out of the question. Even if I could, I do not believe it would save Sydney's life; nothing but happiness combined with care and change will do that. I do not urge you to marry him, but you cannot expect me to understand, or sympathise with, motives which have as their result MURDER."

Ada raised her head indignantly at the word, but it sank again before his glance, it was so hard and piercing, and was powerful because it seemed the expression of complete conviction. He looked as though he could brand murder on her brow. He waited a little while and then said,

"You must grant that there are more ways of killing than by the dagger and bowl; those are only clumsy contrivances."

After this he seated himself at the table and took up his account-book, turning over the leaves with much deliberation to find the last entry.

Ada sat quite still for a few minutes, and her eyes roamed over the carpet and noticed where the seams were well or ill joined. The clock striking roused her, and she got up to leave the room; turning back as she reached the door, and looking all round, as if with the words that had been spoken she would also remember how the room looked that evening. Was she ever likely to forget!

Ada walked quickly into the drawing-room, and through it to the conservatory. She did not want to be

alone, she wanted to be roused in some way, so that her thoughts should not take such fearful hold of her. Sydney threw away the end of his cigar as she came in, and said pettishly,

"What a time you've been, Ada."

"Yes," she answered vacantly.

She came and sat beside him in the midst of the flowers. The scent of the tuberose behind them seemed laden with sadness.

"Tell me what your old doctor said to you."

This subject was to Ada like the boggy of our childhood; though we might put our heads under the blankets we felt it was there, and so it was better to look for it!

"Not much. He gave me some stuff to drink, and some more stuff to rub into my chest, and he told my father I had better go abroad, but the governor says he is too hard up; and certainly unless we all go, I won't stir an inch."

"He does not want you to go till the winter, does he?"

"Yes, at once. It seems I am rather seedy, so you were right for once, Ady!"

"I wish I had been wrong," she said passionately.

Sydney started at her tone. "Why, you don't mean to say you are fussing yourself about me? You don't care, do you? Upon my soul, it is worth being ill for that!"

He put his arm round her waist as he spoke, and she did not resist it.

"Oh! no, it is not worth that," she said, "and I shall like you much better if you get strong."

There was an attempt at playfulness in her voice, though to have cried would have been more true to her feeling.

They heard voices in the drawing-room now; Mr. St.

George had come in. Ada tried to move, but Sydney kept his arm round her waist.

"Don't stir, Ady," he said, "they won't come here, and it is so quiet and nice, and I am so tired after London."

"I want to read."

Her words conveyed no meaning to her, but she felt she must say something.

"An invalid is always spoiled. I shall claim all the privileges of an invalid. I don't see the good of being ill if I can't have my own way."

So they kept their position for a quarter of an hour longer, and Sydney gave her an amusing account of his father's dodges to save money in town.

"And did you not go out anywhere, to a theatre or anything of the kind?"

Ada was beginning to follow what he was saying, to feel more alive, more real, but the future had grown to hideous proportions and seemed to blot out the present.

"My father would not stir, and I could not stand an evening alone with him, so I went to the first theatre I came across. It happened to be the French theatre, so of course I did not understand half of what they said."

Ada laughed.

"How you must have enjoyed it!"

"If you had been there you might have told me what to laugh at, for there were some comic bits in it; but indeed if you had been there, Ady, I should not have minded much whether I understood it or not."

With his disengaged hand he took hers as he spoke. His eyes looked very bright to-night, and the spot of colour on his cheek seemed to spread further and burn deeper.

"Tell me the story of the play ; you understood quite enough to know that."

Ada wanted to check him in all personal conversation, and turn his attention to things unconnected with themselves. It was difficult, for she wished to be kind and loving to him to-night.

"It was a dismal story, rather sensational perhaps. There was a fellow who was in love with a young girl ; she thought she did not care for him, and fancied herself in love with some one else ; so she snubbed him, and when every one was volunteering for a war somewhere or other, and he did not go, she abused him and said he had no pluck, when the poor devil only wanted to be near her. So she drove him to it ; he went out and was shot, and then she found out she loved him when it was too late."

"And the other man ?"

"Oh ! he never cared a straw about her, but was a wild dare-devil sort of fellow, flirting with every girl he came across, and when she lost her money he dropped her like a shot. But there was a lot more, only I did not quite make it out. Some of it was funny but not over refined."

Ada said nothing. Why had she asked him to tell the story ? Was it not fate ? She felt a kind of creeping chill over her as he told it so carelessly and boyishly. Sydney stretched his hand to some tuberose, broke them off and stuck them in Ada's hair, but she did not seem to notice him, and for a little while there was nothing to break the silence but Sydney's occasional cough.

"How awfully pretty you look, Ady," he said, after a few minutes, "I wish you could see yourself."

"It would not give me a bit of pleasure."

Her beauty seemed a curse to her this evening. Why should it make people love her ?

She rose as she spoke.

"Let us go Sydney, it is late."

"Why should we go?" (but he got up). "Let me look at the effect of my adornment."

He turned her face round to him as he spoke and looked at her long and earnestly.

"You are dreary to-night, Ady; what is it?"

"I don't know," she answered with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"Will you kiss me to-night?" he asked slowly, with deep melody in his voice—the melody of passionate emotion—and he laid his hand on her shoulder gently. Why should she not? Perhaps she might learn to love him; perhaps some sympathy, some understanding of his affection, might come to her in the caress. So in the impulse of her tender heart, she lifted her head with a little smile. He folded his arms round her in a second and kissed her.

It was the long passionate kiss of a man who loved with all the strength he was capable of. Who knows—perhaps the joy was deepened and intensified by the coming shadow, which perchance might not pass over him, but might rest on him for ever. That kiss to Ada brought no change of feeling, except that she was a little angry and sorry that it had not been given in the brotherly way that she received it; that there seemed a love in it that she could not reply to, and which made her hope he would not wish again to kiss her.


They passed into the drawing-room without speaking. Mr. St. George looked keenly from one to the other. Sydney's eyes had a strange brightness in them; Ada had flowers in her hair and a slight flush on one cheek. Mr. St. George was pleased and the bland smile came back on his lips.

CHAPTER X.

"CONSTRAINED TO CHOOSE."

TRUTH is sometimes spoken by lying lips ; Ada felt this, as she sat in her room, thinking of her uncle's conversation in the library that evening.

That she should hold any one's life in her hands, seemed too horrible. It could not be ; surely God alone was the disposer of life and death ; and yet it seemed true what Mr. St. George had said. He had spoken with conviction, and some of this conviction had been borne into her mind. When he had first said that Sydney was ill from mental trouble, she had felt for an instant inclined to remind him of the boy's debts, but it would have been dishonourable to have said anything of them, after Sydney's request ; and, after all, she could not think that any worry about his debts could affect his health. Money seemed to her such a despicable thing that any trouble connected with it could be of little moment. No ; she alone seemed the author of all the ill. She remembered what Sydney had told her when he first came from Oxford. In hours of self-accusation, there can be no sterner judges than your own memory and conscience. Sydney had been reckless because of her ; had sought forgetfulness in sin and dissipation because of her. What sin or what dissipation she did not understand ; how could she ? But her imagination drew confused pictures which much surpassed the reality. It



seemed as if she had been standing by, coolly goading him into a pit of wickedness, sickness, and misery, while she would not so much as give the tip of her finger when he stretched his arms for help. She exaggerated her part in the sad history of Sydney's life, but her mental vision was overstrained from the sorrow that lay on her heart.

It was a fearful night of pain, for there was no thought that would soothe her, or make things look any better. The very moonlight that came through her window seemed cold and unanswering. The wind roared in the chimney and shook the trees angrily, as if impatient at their resistance. Cloud after cloud passed over the moon, each blacker than the last, till after giving rare glimpses of light it was darkened altogether. Even as a life, over which sorrow upon sorrow passes, till the last shadow of death rests on it for ever.

What if she married Sydney? If she told him to-morrow that she would be his wife?

An exalted feeling of resolution seemed to fill her heart at the thought. If she saved his life and saw him day by day stronger and happier, surely she would be contented. Was it not the highest duty—self-sacrifice? That it should have been the suggestion of her uncle seemed to set the act in a colder light than if it had been entirely the voluntary and spontaneous impulse of her own heart.

Then the after life? The terrible closeness of the relation of husband and wife—a perpetual presence, almost as constant as your shadow and more often seen—without any of that deep understanding, that knitting of life and character, which makes the true husband a broader, stronger development of the wife.

She shrank from the thought ; it seemed a profanation of a sanctuary wherein her mind and soul grew, uncontrolled by any opinion, undisturbed by any alien spirit. How could she bear it ? Why, already the thought of Sydney as a husband seemed to be blotting out all the sisterly love she had for him, and there was nothing to take its place. Would not Sydney soon discover it himself, and would it not be too bitter for him to wait in vain for a love which, as her husband, he would have a right to claim ? All her constancy of purpose, all her moulding of life into the channels that she had thought purest and best, was it all to be relinquished ? Impossible ; she could not be so untrue to herself as to base all her future life upon a lie.

Oh, those happy days at Homburg ! All joy and peace seemed to lie there in the cold distance ; dead to her for ever. For the past has always a golden light upon it, as the dying day has the glory of sunset. Her mind wandered back to those days and dwelt on every little incident, on every word that Kingsley had spoken, as if she sought to glean some help therefrom for her present difficulty, but Sydney's wearisome cough next door recalled her to the present ; it was like the tolling of St. Sepulchre's bell to the condemned prisoner.

What had Mr. St. George said ? " You cannot expect me to understand, or sympathise with, motives which have as their result MURDER." It was not true—it was not true.

Ada got up in her agitation and walked to and fro. If anything were to happen to Sydney, it could not be her doing. We are not responsible for the feelings that spring up in other people's hearts ; whether they work them good or ill. She had not trifled with Sydney ; she

had not made him love her and then left him to his fate. Her heart was full of love and sorrow for him. Ah! but what was the good of that love and sorrow if it would not save him from death? It was like the mocking address to the cold and hungry, "Be ye warmed and filled."

There was truth perhaps in her uncle's words; they could not have gone so keenly through her if they had not been true. It might be a nobler thing to sacrifice her own feelings than another person's life. What if her views were wrong—the effect of ignorance and romantic childishness?

In our days of glowing enthusiasm, how the cold philosophy of maturer years staggers us and makes our head dizzy and our eyes dim! Ah! if we could only cling to our pure ideal, our elevated principles, should we not grasp the secret of eternal youth? Are not all young things sweet to look on, with truth and beauty on their unseamed faces and rounded forms, and is there not moral beauty in their pure souls? Surely the untainted thoughts, the unclouded vision, fresh from the spiritual world, pierces to the heart of things. The soul that has taken its first draught at the spring of knowledge is like to have had a purer drink than when it has been carried to its lips in earthen pitchers by defiled hands.

The two paths, one of which Ada must take, lay very clear before her, and both of them seemed to terminate in a desolate land. I do not envy the mind that would despise her hesitation. The deep tenderness of her nature made it impossible to say, "I cannot yield, he may die." Her strong belief that all life should be the outward expression of inward conviction and truth, made it equally impossible to say, "I will be his wife."

She was only nineteen, and for an instant the tears gathered in pity at her own youth and ignorance. "If I were only older or had any one who loved me and would think for me." But this was not a question that any one could decide for her, and she knew it.

As the hours crept by and the light of morning was born, weak and cold to the world, her thoughts became sadder. All the powers of her brain seemed quickened to conjure up ghastly images. She thought of death, and saw Sydney's boyish face cold and colourless; the lips, to whose loving words she would not listen, silenced for ever by her cruelty! She saw Sydney so plainly that it seemed as though some sorcerer had shown her the horrible picture in his magic glass. He lay so still—his tall slight form seeming taller and slighter in its rigidity, and his fair, curly hair clustering round his livid forehead as lovingly as it did in life. How could she mourn for him, kneel by his bedside, or say the last good-bye tenderly? How can the willing author of a deed lament the deed done? It would be but the affectation of feeling. All this was so vivid that it seemed as if it had all happened and was in the past—a registered agony, never to be blotted out.

The dim cold light was passing away, and all the beauty of the young day breaking on the world. Afar off, the south wind woke up and began its morning gossip in the trees. The swallows, with a little impatient twitter, shook their wings and darted from the eaves through the sweet-scented air. The cows got up in their lazy way to eat the dainty bits of grass with dew upon them. The shrubs, the trees, the flowers, shook out their finery in the morning breeze. Life everywhere; life in the earth, the air, the sky, and could she withhold

it from a fellow-being ? As soon strip the leaves from the trees in early spring, or burn the vernal grass when the whole earth is clothing itself in beauty, as shut out love and joy from a life that ought to be just commencing !

This time next year if she lived, what would she be doing,—how would life look to her ? Why was there not one glimpse given her that she might estimate her own power of endurance ? Perhaps things she now thought unbearable might be less so when they happened, as hills at our near approach appear less steep than when at a distance. Why can we not mentally realise the after effect of an action in our lives ?

Over and over the same ground, Ada went hopelessly, like one who wanders in a maze and is no nearer the discovery of the exit. As the hours went by she grew more impatient and yet seemed to have no clearer insight as to her duty. At last reasoning was at an end, and she lost the finer parts of the difficulty. What remained to her was simply this : Would she sacrifice herself or Sydney ? She decided in favour of the former. She no longer saw that there was that within her which belonged to the great universal soul of right and truth ; which was hers and yet God's, and which no one can sacrifice without profanation. She saw it no longer because the nearness of death blinded her, and her loving kindness made her weak. As some sort of comfort in her decision, she determined to wait a little while—a week—to see if the means to be used for Sydney's cure would be effectual. Perhaps he was not so very ill. This was the temporary barricade that she erected between herself and her fate ; knowing it would last but a short time.

Now that thus far she had chosen her path, she tried to

banish thought and threw herself wearily on her bed to sleep.

When you fling food to the wolves that are yelping behind you, you draw breath for a while.

Ada was down much later than usual. There was a calm and dignity in her manner which had changed her. Sydney watched her wonderingly and thought she had been poring over some deep, sad book, and it influenced her still.

Ada noticed that her uncle looked at her questioningly, and was very deferential in his manner to her.

Sylvia was the only one that did not vary in her usual ways. She was just as exacting in her petty demands; just as ready to commence an unmeaning discussion and to contradict every one. Never great in her faults or virtues, the bent of her mind was self-concentration.

In the forenoon Ada walked in to her uncle in the library. She came in so gently, that he did not notice her till she stood before him.

"I will tell you my decision in a week uncle."

Her manner seemed to admit of no further discussion.

"I have no doubt," he answered, looking up, "that your decision will be kind and wise."

The coarsest natures are reverent to one whose fate is fixed, in the brief space between the sentence and its execution.

In the afternoon as Ada and Sydney sat together in the gardens, for the day was soft and warm, the latter said, "I think, Ada, these doctors are a set of fools. I feel quite well to-day; there is nothing the matter with me, I believe."

"I hope not," she said, brightening up, "I dare say you'll outgrow it soon if you take care."

"Outgrow it! As if I were a baby! 'I think you look upon me as quite a child.'"

Ada laughed. "What a hurry you are in to be old."

"A long stretch of vigorous manhood and no old age, how glorious it would be!"

He turned round on the grass at her feet and looked up at her. Poor boy! It was hard to think of vigorous manhood in connection with him. How handsome he looked; his fair skin seemed to have grown finer and clearer, his features more delicately defined and his blue eyes brighter; and yet with a shudder Ada thought of that other picture of him which had haunted her last night.

"How horrible it must be to die, Ady! Have you ever thought of it?"

"Yes, often, and I did not mind somehow; it seemed nice to go away into another world."

"But the dying—the darkness coming on,—the coldness; and the body we have been so fond of, poked away under the earth; no sunshine, no breeze, and no one bothering themselves any more about you—ugh!" He plucked up the grass by his side and broke it into little bits.

"What a dreary turn your conversation has taken!"

She would not have minded if it were not for the ghastly under-current of thought that was in her head.

"That is because I feel so jolly and well; don't believe I would talk of graves and dead men's bones if I were down on my luck."

"I don't see why we should be afraid of death for ourselves."

"We are a great deal more afraid of it for ourselves than for others, I can tell you."

"Our fear cannot make any difference, cannot make us immortal. I think Christianity has made cowards of us in that respect."

"That sounds rum!"

"So it does; I should not have said that. I suppose we have misunderstood Christianity and frightened ourselves with its doctrines. Do you remember what brave men there were in Pagan times? They went to death fearlessly; they received him as an honoured guest."

"I suppose," Sydney said doubtfully, "their ignorance made them plucky; it is like an inexperienced fellow across country, he is fearless because he does not know where danger is."

"And what do we know now?"

The question came involuntarily. Why should she trouble Sydney's head with speculation? He mused a little and looked at her wonderingly.

"I think you puzzle your brains over books too much, Ady. You know a lot more than I, but what's the good? A fellow must believe something, and he may as well believe what is simple and what so many other people have believed. It would be so terrible to make a mistake all on your own account."

"A good deal better than making a screen of others."

"I cannot argue with you, Ady, you have such a way of putting things, but I don't see why I should bother my head about it. I am quite contented with a ready-made religion."

"Do not suppose that I want you to invent one;" and she laughed a little.

"It would be a funny jumble if I did; besides, I am not going to die yet."

"Religion is for life more than death, I think."

"How solemn you are! Well, let me see," and he lay on his back, pulling his hat over his eyes to keep the sun off. "In my religion there shall be a great deal of idiotic worship of you, and the goddess shall reward the worshipper at last. He shall be lifted up into heaven and be with her always; they shall dwell in a beautiful land, and the goddess shall be very glad that she came down off her throne, and shall see that his reverence and love has made the worshipper something better than she thought he was."

He spoke softly and dreamily.

"Well, what do you think of my religion?"

"I think it is a very funny jumble, as you said, but it sounds pretty, and possible, perhaps."

That was Ada's first concession, her first effort at recognising in words the possibility of any change in her relation to Sydney.

He pushed his hat back and gazed at her. What loving words rose to his lips! She looked quite calm, with a sort of subdued sadness in her face. He lay still and watched her. His whole being had been kindled into more passionate earnestness since he had kissed her last night. It seemed possible that his boyish dreams might be realised; and if Ada were his, it seemed to him that no life could be more perfect, more blessed than his would be; but now, even with this thrilling sense of future joy stealing over him and waking his nature to its best, he felt for a second as he looked at her, that even after marriage she might be apart from him—far away in a region which at this moment he felt he could not penetrate. It was a fair region surely, or its atmosphere could not have given such deep beauty to her eyes, such exquisite delicacy to her features.

Marriage with him might be a moral clipping of her wings; could he not be brave enough to give her up?

"Ady," and he touched her dress in a clinging way and gave the lie to his words with his eyes. "Ady, if it makes you unhappy that I should bother you—if you can't care for me . . . I'll give you up."

Perhaps he saw incredulity in her face, for, he added, energetically, not eagerly,

"Upon my soul I will if you tell me to."

"I think I can care for you," she said very gently, "but get strong, and do not talk about it at all just now."

It seemed to him an hour before she answered, though it was but a minute. Short as the time was his generous resolution had utterly effervesced. What would he have done if she had taken him at his word? What a fool he had been! He could not give her up; and, after all, he was not such a bad fellow, and why should she not love him in time? But his momentary self-forgetfulness had had a deep effect on Ada; more than any loving speech, more than any long-thought-of scheme for pleasing her. That Sydney, to whom the denial of his hopes might be death, could give them up for her sake, touched her with a sharp reproach. Would she be less noble than he? Poor boy! why did she always under-estimate the beauty of his character?

So those few words did more to advance Mr. St. George's plans than he would ever have dreamt if he had heard them; and Ada's resolution took deeper root that day under the autumn sunshine, while the butterflies were flitting about and making free choice of their brief life without let or hindrance.

CHAPTER XI.

"A LITTLE PLEASURE OF LIFE."

ONE could hardly think at Oaklands that summer had been with them but yesterday. Throughout the night there had been sweeping rain and high wind; they had seemed to carry summer away and leave a little chill in the air which told that autumn had come.

Sydney was no better. Even Ada's desire that it should be so did not deceive her. His cough continued; he had caught more cold in London, and his hands were always either burning with a feverish heat or cold and clammy. It scarcely seemed to Ada needful to delay telling him what she had decided, but still she waited till the expiration of the time she had fixed. The days went very swiftly by and they were very happy days to Sydney. Perhaps his enjoyment was intensified, as light is, by the nearness of shadow. He was less languid, and no hour of the day hung heavily on his hands. He was always with Ada now; and Sylvia, probably instructed by her father, left them to themselves, and was less waspish in her remarks. They read together, and Sydney's brain seemed quickened and awakened from its apathy. He saw things as Ada did, and his mind caught the reflection of hers somehow. She sang to him in those days; she would not selfishly deny him a pleasure from any petty dislike of criticism or from any romantic notion asso-

ciated with the past. What was the past to her now?

Life was full of interest to Sydney now. He saw the change in Ada's manner, and felt it was only a promise of greater happiness for him. He was brighter and more boyishly gay than he had ever been.

Mr. St. George noticed it all and congratulated himself on the improvement. He was quite sure Sydney was recovering, though when evening came he was always exhausted and silent. Ada knew he was not really better, for his room was next her's, and through the long hours of the night she heard his cough.

"If I could only sleep at night I should be all right," he would often say to her.

The last day of the week came, a warmer and a brighter day than those before, and as Ada dressed that morning she tried to think it a good omen. She was always a little bit superstitious, if it can be called so, to seek for voices in nature and find answers to her doubts in the changing sky.

When the Pagans deified the winds and the waves, the sun and the moon, it was, perhaps, only their stronger and more poetical way of acknowledging powers in nature which every thoughtful soul in the Christian world recognises still.

Ada felt almost bright as she went down this morning. We all know the amount of false energy that grows out of a determination which we mean to carry out thoroughly.

"I feel I want some music this morning to refresh me, Ady," Sydney said after breakfast; "I am awfully used up; I could not sleep a wink."

They went together to the drawing-room. Sylvia

generally lay down on the sofa in the library all the forenoon, and Mr. St. George went to look after the farm.

"Is it not much hotter this morning, Ady? I feel as if I could not breathe."

He sat down wearily.

"I'll open the window a little."

"That was a very good move," he said as she did so, and he wiped the drops of perspiration from his forehead. "Now for some songs; something nice, Ady."

"What shall it be?" she asked, turning over the music carelessly and not looking for anything, for she was thinking that she had something to tell him which would be sweeter music in his ears.

"Nothing very lively, I am not in the humour for it this morning; some old ballad."

"Let us see."

She took a bundle of music in her hand and came over to him. She sat down beside him, and as she arranged the pillow, under his head on the sofa, the music slipped from her lap to the floor. She picked up some of it, and her colour went and came as she pretended to look for some song to please him.

"How lazy you are! I don't believe you want to sing a bit."

She looked round at him and smiled a little.

"What is the matter with you, Ady, this morning?" he asked in sudden surprise, for there was something in her face which he could not understand.

"I was wondering whether it would be good news to you if I told you something."

"I don't know; there is only one thing that would be good news to me."

"I want to be your wife, Sydney."

He looked at her with astonishment and unbelief for an instant; then the colour rushed like a flood to his wan cheeks, and he put his arms round her and kissed her.

"Oh! you darling. Then it is all right after all."

He let her go suddenly and leaned back, closing his eyes for a few minutes.

"I felt horribly dizzy for a minute then," he said; "such a strange feeling, I could not describe it, but it's gone. What you've told me just now is too good to be true."

"I don't know if it is good, but it is certainly true."

"What a sweet little wife you'll be," he said, looking at her lovingly. "You are a great deal too good for me."

He did not really think so; few of us are humble to that degree. Ada did not feel that she could yet bear her love for Sydney to be talked about. She feared that he would ask to analyse its growth, in the fond way that lovers do. It is only deep, flawless affection that can bear unending retrospection, and seem ever new and strange in its beauty; it is a well-read, much-prized volume, always giving new delight. Ada led his thoughts away.

"I was thinking this morning, Sydney, that we can go to Italy and get away from the winter here. Won't it be nice?"

"Are you sure that it is me, and not Italy you want?" he asked a little pettishly.

A look of pain crossed her face. Why should he question her?

"I can go to Italy as much as I like without you, *when I am twenty-four*. Do not be unjust."

"Don't be cross, I did not mean it."

"We might go to Como," she said, giving him no time to add more. "It would be too hot to go further south as yet."

"All by ourselves, Ady; just think of that, without the governor or Sylvia, what fun!"

They both laughed.

"I am afraid you'll bully me horribly when we are married," he continued, "on the strength of your three months seniority!"

"I shall only bully you to get well, to grow broad and strong, and stop that perpetual coughing. When that happens you may have your own way in everything."

"I am sure you will always want me to read musty books, and know what every old ruffian thought about life!"

"No, you may read yellow backed-novels all day if you like."

She laughed at him, and her laugh sounded bright and hopeful.

"I shan't read anything, for I know what I shall think of life."

"What?" she asked, for she was tempted to gauge the happiness she was giving him. In proportion to its depth seemed to be her sense of having done rightly.

"I need not tell you; you will see it every day we are together."

The glow of his deep blue eyes confirmed his words.

"By the way," Ada said after a little silence, "have you heard anything of your friend Signor Florio, lately?"

"Why? What made you think of him?"

"I wish that money you owe him was paid. I don't like you to be under an obligation to him."

"I wish it was, with all my heart, but it is not clear to me how it is to be done."

"Will you let me undertake to pay him?"

Sydney did not answer at once.

"You know," she added laughingly, "I may look after your affairs now."

"Yes, but why not wait till we are married? What is the good of transferring the debt from me to you?"

"Only that I do not like you to leave it in an uncertain kind of way. He knows I shall be rich some day and that he is sure of his money. When we go abroad, we don't want to be bothered with business."

"I should like him to know that you are going to be my wife," he said reflectively.

"Oh! never mind about that, he need not know yet."

"Then what do you want me to do?"


"I want you to find his address and write, saying, that I undertake to pay your debt with all the interest as soon as I come into possession of my property, and if he will name any place to send the money, we can pay whenever we like."

"It seems a funny way of doing things, but I'll write if you like."

"I should think," he added laughing, "that it would be quite unnecessary to tell him of our engagement after that!"

"It seems as if it would be nice to have this stupid debt of yours out of our minds."

He did not like her paying it, but he could not tell her that his father had engaged to pay his debts if he married her; it seemed too much like a wager on the



probabilities of their marriage; besides, he did not wish to have any further talk with his father on the subject. So after a little reflection he thought Ada's idea was not a bad one, and said,

"I think you had better write the letter yourself, Ady, to make it more business-like. I have Florio's address in London, and he says letters will always be forwarded to him from that."

So Ada got pen and paper, and wrote, and they laughed over the preciseness of the letter. Neither of them knowing much about such things, they pronounced it to be a masterpiece in legal style.

"It is quite beautiful," Sydney said as they folded it up, "but I don't see why Florio should have the smallest scrap of your writing."

"You told me to write."

"Yes, but now that I think of it, it is much too great a treat for him."

"You see," he added, "now that you have made such a rash statement as you did this morning, you are my property, and I am developing the stinginess of my father."

Ada did not speak, she was beginning to feel a desire to be alone to think a little over her new position.

"Ady," he said, and his voice sank very low, and there was a soft pleading look in his eyes, "will it be very soon? It seems unreasonable, but I feel now as if I could not bear any delay. I might not live you know."

The last words were spoken slowly and wearily. She looked round at him with sharp anxiety in her face.

"I don't mean that quite," he added, "for I do not believe that there is much the matter with me, but who

can tell? And when happiness is near, a fellow may be impatient."

She did not speak for a few minutes, but her eyes rested sadly and tenderly on him. Not with the timid glance of a young girl on her lover, but rather with the fond gaze that a mother gives to the child who looks to her for everything. Sydney's dependence on her was what touched her most, and filled her with a pathetic tenderness which supplied the place of all other feeling. She had yet to learn that in the close bond of marriage, that would not suffice.

"It shall be as soon as you wish, dear," she said gravely.

She was sincere, for she desired to leave no room for indecision, but step at once into the world she had chosen, and not look back.

The lunch bell rang.

"Good heavens!" said Sydney, "who would have thought we had been here so long. If time is going to pass in this fly-away manner for the future, our lives will soon be over, won't they, Ady?"

She was putting away the music and did not think it necessary to reply.

"I feel uncommonly shaky to-day; I wonder why that is."

He put his hand on Ada's shoulder as they went into the dining-room.

"We may as well tell them at once," he added, "get it over. You don't mind?"

"No."

So they went in, and when they had sat down, after a little awkward silence, Sydney said, colouring very much and with an uncomfortable little nervous laugh,

"Father, Ada has been silly enough this morning to promise that she would be my wife. I thought you would both like to know."

And he looked at Sylvia for some girlish gladness and sympathy at the news.

"Oh! indeed," she said, "she was a long time thinking about it."

Then she turned to Ada, who sat beside her,

"I suppose I ought to wish you joy."

Here she leant towards Ada and made a peck at her cheek. Then it suddenly dawned on Ada that they would all kiss her, and she was filled with amazement and horror. She looked at Sydney and saw that he looked amused, for Mr. St. George had already left his place at the head of the table. She would much rather be kissed by the old butler!

"My dear niece," her uncle began as he walked over to her, "I am really glad," and his bland smile stretched his mouth a little further than usual, for it was a festive occasion; "really glad, you don't know what pleasure you have given me."

She did not want to give him any pleasure!

"I trust," he continued, putting his hand on her shoulder (the dreadful moment was coming), "that you will have all the happiness you deserve."

Oh! it was over. He had actually kissed her! She had an impression of something hard and utterly unlike a human face having been rubbed against hers, and she indulged a hope that when she became his daughter-in-law this kiss would not be of daily occurrence; and her next idea was how much time must elapse before she could get upstairs to wash her face! Her expression was so ludicrous that Sydney began laughing and Ada

caught the infection and laughed too. The others looked rather astonished at their hilarity, but thought it right to join mildly, and a looker-on could scarcely have imagined that there was a heavy heart among those who sat round the table that day.

In the exuberance of Mr. St. George's spirits that evening, he had champagne at dinner, and they made merry over the betrothal of Sydney and Ada. Mr. St. George made a speech in which the same thought was presented to his listeners in as many different forms as fish at a Greenwich dinner!

Sydney was happy and excited, and when they came into the drawing-room, caught Ada round the waist, and before she could stop him valed two or three times round the room. Then he dropped into a chair and panted in the most painful way, and coughed so long that Ada, after bringing him everything that she thought could check it, gave it up and tried not to listen to him,—a useless effort. At last he stopped, and for the rest of the evening lay back almost in a state of torpor from exhaustion.

Ada went to bed quite quickly that night, for she felt so tired that she longed to be asleep; but the moment she blew out her candle and laid her head on her pillow, she felt thoroughly awake and restless. It was blowing hard, perhaps that was the reason, for she always partook of the restlessness of nature. The room seemed full of unseen presences! She could not feel alone. Her thoughts were so keenly alive that as they issued from her brain they gained new spiritual properties and came back to mock her.

There was a faint knocking somewhere; she sprang

up and said, "Come in," but no one came and she lay down again.

There was some spirit in the wind, for it moaned at her window for admittance and then sighed wearily and went away. There were strange elfish gambles in the chimney, and some of the spirits had come clattering down, while others mocked them with a low chuckle at the top. Some one had let loose the imprisoned souls to-night; they carried the chill of their graves with them, and as they moved, a thin cold air swept over Ada's face.

What do we know of ghosts? Of anything that we cannot touch and handle? That immaterial something we call a spirit, why, the whole atmosphere of the world may be full of them for aught we know. Our bodies are great screens between us and them. There are beings with so strong a spirituality that they live in the world less constrained than their fellows by their material habitation; and there are moments of intense emotion, when perhaps their bodies sink prematurely into the nothingness that awaits them in the future and their souls triumph. But the victory brings its pains, for, with the perceptions of a future state, comes a strange dread which the soul shall not know when it enters the spiritual world through the accustomed portal of nature.

Ada tried quietly to vanquish her excited feelings. She lighted her candle and read. Some one called her; it seemed like Sydney's voice. She ran to his door and listened, but there was no sound. She stood there for some minutes, and at last heard him give a slight cough and turn in bed. He could not have called her, and yet she had distinctly heard her name, "Ada; Ada."

•


It was cold standing there, though she had her warm dressing-gown on ; so she went slowly back, but she left her door ajar in case he called again.

Everything was quite still in the house. She tried to read—a shadow seemed to pass between her and her book and she looked up quickly, feeling that she must see some one. No, there was nothing there. Why did the candle burn so unsteadily? Sometimes flaring up and sometimes growing duller and duller till the room grew full of shadows?

The door gave a tiny creak and opened a little, and Ada waited, with a heart whose every beat was a sharp pain. Surely some faint misty outline passed along by the wall! It was going towards the window—. No, it was not there at all. What a silly fancy! She would shut the door or else she could not keep herself from imagining that some one was coming in. She listened a minute, heard no sound, and shut the door. She blew out her candle once more and lay down, trying every means that she had ever heard of to drive herself to sleep. She succeeded at last; if that can be called sleep which is unconsciousness to bodily surroundings and keen wakefulness to hideous and unnatural sights and sounds. Her dreams pursued and devoured one another; she was always in some new scene more horrible than the first; till finally she woke with a start.

There were footsteps and voices in the passage. It was morning, though early still, to judge by the light.

What was this unwonted disturbance? A faint dread, of she knew not what, made Ada throw on her dressing-gown and hurry out to see what it was. Sydney's door was open and Mr. St. George was going in; she followed him. Sydney was propped up with pillows; his face was



perfectly colourless; and in hideous contrast, great crimson stains were on his mouth, his hands, his handkerchief. Death impatient of delay had broken a blood-vessel in his chest, and let his young life flow out in a warm stream. They had checked the bleeding, but Sydney could not speak; could scarcely move his eyes. He saw Ada as she entered. She suppressed her cry of horror and came near him. Her uncle saw her then for the first time, and turned towards her with a glare of hatred. He looked like some wild beast whose fierceness shows as it stands over its offspring.

Where was the necessity for smooth looks and pleasant lies now? She, that soft girl with the devil's beauty, had killed his son, and when it was too late wanted to gain the credit of having tried to save him!

He came near her, and whispered so low that Sydney could not hear him,

“You timed your decision well!”

His lips took hideous contortions as he spoke, for passion would not let them perform their office quietly, but struggled for expression. It was some comfort, some outlet to strike with words if not with hands at the being whom he looked on as the curse of his boy's life.

Ada, with eyes wide open with horror and grief, only drew nearer and laid her hand on Sydney's.

CHAPTER XII.

"GREAT LENGTH OF DEADLY DAYS."

As the day died, Sydney sank. The doctor came, but what could he do? Life was going, and no man could call it back. Sydney never spoke again. His lips moved sometimes, but no sound came; a slight, slight pressure of Ada's hand was all that told her he was conscious of anything. All through the night Ada was with him. Her uncle had said nothing more; he seemed to try and endure her presence as she was necessary to Sydney. Sylvia had come in twice, with apparent shrinking from such a sad sight; had cried weakly and gone back to her room.

As the day dawned and the shadows fled away, Sydney left them for ever. There was a very slight struggle—he was too weak to resist—a few moments of stifled breathing; then an eternal calm.

Sylvia was carried away by her father in strong hysterics, and for a few moments Ada was alone with the dead. How she envied him!

Why should the hopeful and life-prizing go and those whose hearts are weary be left? We always ask the question, and life brings no answer; perhaps death will. Each one we love who dies, recalls a previous death, as though our sorrow must be all massed together. The present pain renews past suffering and adds another

pang. What is this death we all dread so much? A common every-day occurrence, and yet always unfamiliar. We see it come to all the homes around us, and yet we stand in its presence with scared eyes.

I think not that the pang of parting soul and body is greater or as great as the pains of life; and yet as I witness death, and its solemnity is on me, it seems the worst of all things because the most irrevocable. Through closed doors and windows the spirit is gone; could it not have lingered a moment and by a word have put an end to this mystery?

To every conception of the spirit clings some material notion. Can we catch no true idea of it from the power of our thought? No walls, no doors can hinder it, it is omnipresent, it is spirit; but then comes the bodily impediment to the completion of that belief. Thought finds expression in speech; but the freed spirit, how does it communicate? What a mist, what a vapour would thought be, if speech did not give it shape! Who can tell, perhaps spirits need no speech, but penetrate one another as light passes through glass?

"He will understand now," thought Ada, for a moment lifted into the atmosphere of the unseen, and feeling that infinite knowledge was Sydney's now that he had left the poor, faulty body, and so she was able to look calmly on him and bid him good-bye. She did not realise then how different things would appear when the daily routine was resumed, when the petty cares and bickerings had waxed strong again. Instead of the presence of a spirit, which just now seemed to linger with them and bring them into subtle relation to the true and the eternal, there would simply be an absence which would be thought of by those around her—and by

herself in weak moments—as brought about by her selfishness and obstinacy.

Weeks went by. Mr. St. George was once more at his account-books. His strict surveillance and economy in the house and place continued. His conversation was as diffuse and bland as usual, and as empty of all living interest. Sylvia was as complaining as ever; as exacting of petty attentions; as scornful of Ada. The latter clung more to solitude; studied hard, and sought for help and sympathy amongst the souls that had walked the earth long years ago, and seen life in such a true light that generations have listened to their words. Except that the dwellers at Oaklands wore black, one might have supposed that Sydney was at Oxford. Yet they were changed by Sydney's death. The trees, the grass, the flowers are the same when the sun is darkened, and yet, are they not changed somehow when the light is gone?

Mr. St. George had never loved Ada; now he hated her. If Sydney had lived and she had been his wife, she would have had his approbation; and though there would always have been something antagonistic to him in her nature, he would not have admitted it even to himself; he was too great a diplomatist. Now he could not endure the sight of her, and so strong was the feeling that at times it almost overcame his habitual concealment of his thoughts. Perhaps he would have been somewhat better and finer if he had let his anger and dislike appear; even as we esteem the lion that thunders forth his wrath a nobler beast than the tiger which springs on you unawares. But can we help our nature? It seemed a good thing and a forbearing to Mr. St. George to repress his feelings and treat Ada

blandly. She had ruined his hopes for a girlish whim. Through selfishness she had killed his son. That was truth. She might disguise it to herself as much as she liked, with a woman's subtlety; there was the fact to speak for itself. He had been kind to her. Left a lonely orphan, he had given her a father's care. How, as he dwelt on this, his conduct swelled to magnanimity and hers shrank to base ingratitude! He had desired that she should be his daughter, and that her life should be passed with them. If he had speculated with her money, it was only to enrich Sydney and through him to enrich her. This act of his seemed altogether justifiable, nay, more than justifiable.

Now Sydney was dead. The thought of his spirit in the presence of God, a part of his own being as it were—gone to render his account, gave to Mr. St. George no softer, truer views.

There was left to him but one child to plot and scheme for now. Well, though she was but a poor thing in body and intellect (he always thought rather contemptuously of Sylvia), her position if he lived should be nearly equal to Ada's. If there was any justice in the world, surely there must be some equivalent to him for all the care he had given this niece. If she could not pay for it in any other way, it should be rendered in riches and power to his only child.

All the possibilities of the coming years seemed to occur to Mr. St. George. If Ada were to die before she were twenty-four, it would not benefit him much; for her money, if she died intestate, would be divided between a host of relations. The only palpable advantage of her death would be that her presence

would no longer remind him of his dead boy. As to inducing her to make a will in his or Sylvia's favour, the idea was not entertained for a moment. He estimated Ada's hatred to him as exactly equal to his for her, and therefore he deemed it better that there should be no will at all than one against his interests. When she was twenty-four she would no doubt dismiss her guardian, utterly ungrateful for all he had done; and having worked him the cruellest injury that it was in any one's power to do, would see his face no more, and would probably marry the first fool that asked her! This was the future that Mr. St. George sketched for Ada; and seeing this, he concluded that there was nothing to be done but to endure her presence a little longer and indemnify himself as best he could for all he had suffered; and this would not be revengeful or even dishonourable, but simple self-justification.

To Sylvia, Sydney's death had brought much self-pity. While the train of condoling visitors lasted, the interesting position of an afflicted sister had its pleasures; but when this had passed, and when her taunts and cruel allusions had driven Ada into absolute silence, she began to miss Sydney; to find the house dull; to grow more discontented; to long for the kind of life that nature evidently intended her for, viz., the round of empty gaiety; the friends who would see in her superficial brilliancy of conversation, greater depths beneath; the men who would appreciate her appreciation of them! She wanted a kingdom, though it might be a barren land, where the birds had no songs and the flowers no perfume.

In truth, Oaklands was a lonely place; no wonder it palled on her, and no wonder, having nothing in her

mind to solace her, she fixed on Ada as the thorn in her path, and looked on her own delicacy as the sufferings of a martyr. She was no worse than many other women, poor thing !

And Ada ? There was never any time in her life of such perfect isolation as this that followed Sydney's death. She could not see things simply, life seemed a tangled mass of difficulties. Things she had done without a particle of indecision or doubt seemed the result of sinful thoughtlessness ; acts she had pondered over much seemed equally blameworthy, because her decision therein was out of the reach of reason from the strength of her own prejudices and personal feeling. She was for ever haunted by Sydney's face and by the thought of having sacrificed a living love for a dead one. The remembrance that she had yielded at last brought her no comfort, for if she had been wrong in consenting to marry Sydney, she had not any the less violated her principles, because death had prevented the accomplishment of her design ; and if she had been right, why could she not have decided sooner, and not have wavered in a weak way till it was too late.

It was hard for her, poor child ! but she was too brave to drift and accept things as they appeared on the surface, so her struggles taught her much and would teach her more.

There is a great deal of false sentiment about the idea of unselfishness, which clings to our younger years ; it becomes sometimes a mere tearing up of our individualism into shreds, to give to those around us, so that there is no perfect soul left capable of any exalted act.

As we grow older we recognise that a great part of our life passes in unwinding the coils of childish teaching and habit. Everything we believe in must be the free choice of our own unbiassed will and intellect, to have any true guiding power with us. To expect to live truly by the rules of others, is to expect to ignite a substance with a burning-glass without finding the focus.

In these days the nearness of Sydney's sad fate blinded Ada to the truth of things; as the horrors of carnage, at moments, shuts out from the soldier the nobility of the cause he fights for. She was entirely cut off from all living help and sympathy. What was the intercourse she held with her uncle or cousin? Empty sentences about the weather or the neighbours, or worse still, some idle discussion which ended in unpleasant words.

It is strange how such an isolated life forces deep thought on you, and brings a thousand problems into your brain, which you might imagine a life in the world would more readily give rise to. The fact is, most of us are unwilling to think. It is so much easier to act, and if once we grow into the habit of filling up the hours exclusively with petty cares, active and kindly we may be, but we shall be wanting in that which lifts a human soul out of appearances into truth, and this more especially befalls women. We men get a chance of seeing a little below the surface; but, alas! we take little advantage of it.

Ada's education had been wonderfully free from narrow limits, except at school, and there she had hated everything; so that it could have had but little influence over her. Her father's theology had left hazy ideas in her

head; but still she had accepted the popular notions on religion, had gone to church, and had had a vague idea that all would come right in the end. She had imagined that some occasional elevated feelings that came to her at the sound of sacred music or an eloquent sermon, was the glow of true religion in the soul. In her first difficulty all this had seemed empty to her; it told her nothing, it had given her no strength.

It was different now. All her reading and thought had been leading up to a new standing ground, though she did not perceive it. Without any warning finger held up to her she plunged into the books at Oaklands, and found for herself a strange and unusual education. It might have been hurtful to many women; perhaps that is the reason why we hedge girls round with such care; but "ignorance is not innocence," and it is to be questioned whether the blinded, drawing-room safety of the mass is not too dearly purchased by the loss of many who, from their high aims and consequent grandeur of soul, would glorify the whole sex. These are problems.

In this garden of literature Ada walked unhurt; if there were poisonous herbs, she knew how to handle them. Nothing took root in her mind but what had in it a spark of the true and the beautiful. It is always so with every one of us if we have an answering chord in our breast. Unless we read for forgetfulness, amusement, or some other vanity, what is best is only what is powerful with us. It is as if God spoke. He does communicate his nature to those who are fit recipients of it.

Can any one look back and mark the time when everything widened to his mental vision? When the world seemed changed and he realized his own power, and what to him was good and what was evil? I think not. These

things steal on the soul. They came subtly to Ada. Gradually she sailed out on a wide sea of thought, and more and more distant grew the shores of old teaching and passively received laws to which she had been moored.

Ada recognised in herself the power that was to mould her life, and saw that in obedience to what was true for her was the only right development of that life. But what was true for her was not necessarily true for others. It was a religion, the doctrines of which could only be unfolded in her life, and could not be transplanted into any one else's. As it took possession of her soul, she felt that she truly lived. All this separated her still more from those with whom she dwelt, erected a barrier of individuality which not the most curious or intrusive could break down.

Not many days after Sydney's death a letter had come to Ada from Signor Florio, acknowledging the receipt of her letter and acquiescing in the transference of his claim from Sydney to Miss St. George. It was a short and business-like note, and expressed his willingness to wait for payment of the debt any length of time that it suited Ada. He was in Italy, but his old address in London, he said, would always find him.

A letter was quite an event in Ada's life; for, except an occasional letter from Mrs. Bruton or an invitation from one of the neighbours, she had no correspondence with the outer world. Florio's letter gave a new bent to her thoughts for a time. He was at Florence, the birth-place of her mother. He was evidently full of the spirit of the place; for, by a few words, he had made her think of the southern life and its beauties of Nature and art, and all the more lifeless and cold did her life seem.

When she was free to do as she liked, she would live in Italy, and by the intensity of life there would make up for all the years of mere existence that were dragging through. She was too young to see that freedom is only comparative, and there is always something springing up in our life which creates necessities and narrows the field of our action.

Four years seemed a long time to wait. Ada feared that in that time she might lose all desire to lead a different life, and might grow into passive union with her surroundings. Four years is so long if you look forward to what you desire, so short if it leads up to what you dread.

Ada needed some occupation which would be absorbing and real to her. Study was not enough. A mind cannot always receive and never give. If the mountain streams flow into a reservoir, there must be some outlet or the water grows stagnant and leaks away, we know not where. Her own life and the lives of others began to form faint pictures in Ada's mind in those days. Often, in her lonelines, ideal beings, whom she had endowed with imaginary qualities, took life and seemed, apart from her will, to move and speak, to struggle and suffer. Then the thought came to her that she would try to write. It would be a mental activity, and, perhaps, in ideal people she might find a companionship, which certainly did not come in her daily life. When she had begun work, she soon found out how many things go to the making of a writer.

Art will tolerate no rival. If there is some thought in your heart over which you linger, and for the fonder and deeper nursing of which you lay down your pencil, allowing the importunate thought to master you, do not

think that you will make progress or come near to truth. If your own life can be so blent with your art, so worked into it, as the skilful fingers weave the wool into tapestry, it is well; your art will grow beneath your hand.

With Ada, writing was an occupation, not an inspiration. It could not destroy the remembrances of her own life or idealise them, so that they should seem the story of another being in whom she was interested, but in whom she had no personal feeling.

It was not long before she found out that she was not doing anything that was worth much. She fancied that if the circumstances of her life were to be different, her mind might produce better results, but the very desire for fortuitous aids proved that she had not chosen the labour which was fitted to her powers. When the mind comes into its true heritage, the rocky soil is made a garden and blossoms, and the mind looks not at what might have been if its home had been in a fairer land.

Ada found that writing was no real outcome of her nature. She would sit an allotted time at it, but she was glad when the expiration of that time gave her an excuse for relaxing her efforts; and as what we can do best is always done with most ease, she gradually doubted her power, and unwillingly gave up her attempts. Without faith in our labour, as the highest thing we can do, it is a mere mechanical industry.

CHAPTER XIII.

“CE QUE FEMME VEUT, DIEU VEUT.”

THE chill of winter came on ; those dull, dark days, which seem to mourn the dying year, and to have no smile, no hope in them.

Ada grew restless and unhappy. The air seemed full of physical and moral decay at Oaklands, and everything depressed her. Cold seemed to deaden her faculties, and winter was made more odious to her by her uncle's determined opposition to more than a limited number of fires. She often sat in her room for hours, scarcely knowing what she read, and feeling so torpid and paralysed that even a fast walk through the woods failed to make her feel alive.

Just then an invitation came for her and Sylvia to stay for a few days at a neighbour's, some ten miles distant.

“I suppose you do not wish to go,” Sylvia said, as Ada read the letter aloud.

“Why ?”

“Because I should like it, and our tastes are not generally the same.”

“They are this time ; I think I should like to go.”

Mr. St. George made no remark as yet ; he was considering the possible advantages and disadvantages of that visit. He did not wish Ada to run the chance of

meeting any one who might fall in love with her, or persuade her that he had done so, which was much the same thing. He always thought Ada's money would be a very tempting bait to any one. On the other hand, the prospect of Oaklands being free from its real mistress for even a few days, pleased Mr. St. George much ; for his dislike of his niece grew none the less strong as time wore on. Sydney's death, too, being so recent, Mr. St. George doubted whether, in the few days Ada would be absent, any new lover would be successful in his attentions. So having considered all this, he, in a few moments, decided that there would be no great risk in letting the two girls go; but as he deemed opposition was the best course if he wanted anything done, he said carelessly,

"I don't think you will care about it much ; the Prestons are people not quite your own equals in society. Indeed, I don't know how they can entertain ; they must be very badly off."

That her uncle should look down on these people touched Ada's republican notions—with which just now she was all aflame—and she said quickly,

"I have always heard papa say they were nice, and I dare say we shall like our visit."

She looked to Sylvia for confirmation. Sylvia would have liked to contradict her, but her wish to go was too strong ; the attraction of any change too great.

"Yes," she said in a decisive manner, "we shall go. If it is slow, it can't be worse than it is here ; one might as well be buried alive."

"I am sorry, my dear," her father said slowly and impressively, "that your home is so dull, but my means, as you well know, do not permit of my entertaining in a manner suitable to our position."

Ada made a mental vow that she would never entertain in a manner suitable to her position !

"I dare say," Sylvia answered. "I was not complaining." [I wonder is there any time in her life that this sort of woman acknowledges that she complains.] "But I do not see why we should not enjoy ourselves when there is an opportunity. I do not think we are so wonderfully well-born that we need look into other people's genealogies."

Immediately Ada felt herself converted into a fierce aristocrat, for this remark of Sylvia's evidently alluded to Ada's mother, who, because she was a foreigner, could not in Sylvia's idea—or indeed in the idea of most Englishmen—be well-born. Aristocracy was essentially an English characteristic, and had died out in other lands with the death of the old brilliant empires !

It was decided they should go. The invitation was accepted, and Ada felt glad of the break, though she rather despised herself for it.

Sylvia was wonderfully amiable now, the secret thereof being that her wardrobe required looking over, and sundry alterations, to enable her to produce that effect which she predicted for herself. Ada was consulted, and her skilful fingers employed ; and she gave time and care to it with a good grace, for she wanted to get away from herself, to get a little mental rest. The discovery that her writing was a failure gave her a kind of intellectual check, which disturbed her and made her glad of a little empty excitement. It amused her to make Sylvia's dresses pretty ; it was an artistic study.

The day before they started, everything, to the smallest lace or ribbon, being complete in Sylvia's adornments, she magnanimously offered to help Ada.

"You are always rather dowdy in your dress," she said," and you have much more money to spend than I have."

But Ada did not appreciate her cousin's taste, and declined her offer ; and Sylvia, having had all she wanted done, could indulge in a scornful sniff ! It was a bright home in which they spent the next few days, for the house was full of young girls and lads ; brothers and sisters and cousins, all fresh to the world, with pliant tempers and readiness to oblige ; qualities common in large families.

Both Ada and Sylvia enjoyed their visit. The latter was surprisingly full of amiability and good spirits. Ada formed no friendship at the Prestons', did not feel herself drawn to any one, and but for one trifling incident this visit would have had no significance in her life.

The evening before they left, they were all sitting round the fire, chatting about any nonsense that occurred to them, when the conversation turned on a girl who had lunched there that day, and whose face had interested Ada.

"Miss Reade," said one of the girls in answer to an inquiry of Ada's, "is an orphan. She lives with an old deaf aunt."

"Awful old dust," interpolated one of the boys.

"Horrid old tyrant !" said another.

"And there is no one else in the house ?" asked Ada.

"No, it is very dull for the poor girl ; she reads or rather shouts to this old woman, who makes her feel her dependence every hour of the day."

"If I were Miss Reade," said Amy Preston, a bright girl of seventeen, with flashing eyes, "I should run away, and be a governess or something. I would not

stand being bullied by the old thing ! What is the good of being alive if one leads a life like that ? ”

“ I believe you would knock the old lady down on the smallest provocation ! ” said her brother, for Miss Amy was well known not to bear control.

There was a general laugh, but Ada was silent, and though they still talked of Miss Reade, she did not hear them. She was thinking of what Amy Preston said. She was right ; it was better to do anything than have life crushed out slowly. To herself, it was a suggestion of escape from her own hateful existence, and it gave her a thrill of hope, though as yet her ideas were very confused about it. Her entertainers wondered why Miss St. George was so dull that evening, and the eldest son, who was aspiring to be a lady’s man, tried some of his most fascinating compliments without success.

Ada was asking herself why she should bear a life that was odious to her, that dwarfed all her capacities, and seemed to take all brightness and youth away. Why should she wait for her freedom through the best years of her life ?

They returned home, and Ada took these thoughts with her. Oaklands seemed more dreary than usual after their visit, even though there was nothing very sympathetic to Ada in any of the people she had been with. Of what use was she to any one ? What good was she to herself, leading this life ? If she had been able to write, it would have been different, but now her life seemed quite aimless ; only getting through time, and claiming nothing for it, giving nothing to it. But the position we are in has great power. It does not seem possible to alter it suddenly. A tree exposed to the winds on one side has a bent which makes erectness seem impossible.

Difficulty after difficulty presented itself to Ada, till the thought was even laid aside for a month. December came and the snow fell, and made everything more cold without and more dreary within, for Sylvia saw no beauty in the pure white garment in which the earth was wrapped; no grandeur or dignity in the leafless trees, showing black beneath their hoary covering. It was stupid weather, because no visitors came to break the monotony, and she vented her feelings in more than usual acidity and cruel allusions to Sydney's death. The latter made Ada wince, for she could not in these sad days quite free herself from reproach or shake off the shuddering thoughts of that death into which Sydney had gone so young.

The snow rested long on the earth and tired the eyes. The idea of leaving Oaklands recurred to Ada more strongly than ever. A thought, if it be true and deep, comes back as surely as the return of the sun at dawn. The strong feeling of a right to chose her own path in life was a true one. The great desire to do something, to be something, was as real a feeling as makes the imprisoned bird take wing through the open window. How was Ada's time passed? In a trifling round of household duties, and in her solitary hours in the study of great men's thoughts; in a storing up of wisdom which only made her own life appear the more empty.

What was the good of nourishing and guarding her body when the soul was stifled within? It was as foolish as to deck a house with comfort and ornament, and keep the shutters closed, no light within by day or night.

The difficulties of leaving Oaklands were many and great.

Of how much authority the law gave to her uncle, Ada

had not the remotest idea. She doubted not that he could force her to return if she left home ; and it seemed to her more hateful to be, by any deed of hers, under actual obedience to him, than to endure her present life and evoke no evidence of his power. The fact that her little pin-money was quite her own gave her a slight feeling of independence. Added to what she might earn, it seemed a mine of wealth ! In what slight reverence the young hold money. The want of gold can be no check to their visions. It is one of the most beautiful characteristics of youth, it is the subservience of the material to the spiritual. As we grow older we grow more sordid.

When Ada faced at once all the impossibilities that came to her mind, her plan seemed hopeless. She must take them one by one.

Suppose she made up her mind to go, and that she could get away—how could she become a governess, who would recommend her ?

As a reply to that question, came the recollection of Mr. Westbury and his request, that if ever he could be useful to her she would write to him. She had scarcely ever thought of him since.

There are people in one's life who are like Encyclopædias in our library—we refer to them to clear up a difficulty ; we put them aside and they occupy no places in our lives, though truly we owe them a debt. Ada was a little bit ashamed of thinking only of Mr. Westbury to make use of him.

Suppose he could help her ; she could not be a governess under her own name. She almost laughed at this difficulty. Now she began to pursue her propositions excitedly.

If everything went smoothly, and she got away without awaking suspicion, could not her uncle find her out and bring her back ignominiously? This was her great trouble. If she went to London, and from thence to whatever place Mr. Westbury found for her, would not the chance of her detection be lessened? London was such a vast place, that it seemed to her as if it could swallow up any one and hide them for ever. But she had visions of detectives, and the whole police machinery being set in motion for her discovery!

Gradually, however, as Ada harboured the thought of choosing a life for herself, her hopes became stronger than her fears, and it appeared possible that in the hide-and-seek game she proposed, the seeker might be baffled. We have a singular reluctance to commence any new and untried course of action. It seems fraught with dangers too great to face. We hesitate to put in force that sovereign will which is the glory of man's being. And yet when we have acted, and the deed which has long lived in our mind is born into external existence, how contemptible seem our difficulties, how cowardly our hesitation! All the results we dreaded have vanished.

It is well for us if at any time we can realise that our lives are entirely our own, and that no action, which is the outward form of a right impulse, can be lost and smothered in unworthy results. The immediate dreaded effect of it on others is always wonderfully less than we imagine it will be.

Had it been plain to Ada that it was a duty to remain at Oaklands, she would have thrust away the thought of leaving it; for, in a noble mind, duty is always more powerful than self-pleasing.

Not immediately did Ada plunge into the stream which

tempted her, but when Christmas had come and gone, she put one foot in tentatively. She found Mr. Westbury's address and wrote to him. She reminded him of his promise, and without preamble or excuse told him that she had lost her father, was very unhappy in her own home, and wished to be a governess, and asked him would he help her. She added that she wished to be as far away from Dullstoke as possible, and not to bear her own name.

Even the posting of this letter, and receiving of Mr. Westbury's reply, seemed full of dangers. The post-bag lay on the hall-table for the reception of letters, might not her uncle look into it? The letters were generally received at breakfast time and distributed by Mr. St. George. He did not usually question her as to her letters, but he might, and what should she say? She made a hobgoblin of her fears which followed her about, and at which she was afraid to glance. She must risk it. She sent her letter, and apparently no one saw it, for no remarks were made. She waited anxiously for a reply, and every post that came made her feel wretchedly uncomfortable. She did not feel sure that she would not betray herself when the letter was handed to her across the table by her uncle!

Day after day, week after week passed and no letter came. The nervous hope of success faded into utter hopelessness. Now Ada knew how much she wanted to carry out her scheme. How slight seemed all the barriers she feared compared to her strong desire to go away! There was nothing to be done now, no one else to apply to. She could only wait. When she was no longer a minor, there would be no incentive to work because she would be rich, and probably she would live a stupid, flat,

unprofitable life like every one else. Perhaps she would ask her uncle and cousin to continue living with her ; she would be accustomed to them by that time surely, some living creatures would be necessary to her, and she would not feel inclined to start out into the world and advertise for friends !

Poor Ada ! Everything seemed very hard for her. She tried to supply the place of mental activity by bodily ; took long walks in the cold and wet, and thereby made herself very tired and weak. She grew ill and sleepless, and in the quiet of the nights she was fanciful about herself, and thought she might die and was glad, for all worry would be at an end.

With Ada it was impossible for this state of mind to last long, for it was cowardly. She betook herself to her books again, and the world became new and beautiful to her. There was ever opening out before her glimpses of an intellectual inheritance, and to these lands she could roam without let or hindrance.

One morning, when all hope of hearing from Mr. Westbury had died out, or Ada thought it had died out, a letter was handed to her across the table at breakfast, in just the way she had expected weeks ago. Though her heart gave a throb, she showed no excitement, being in a different frame of mind now. The letter was from Mr. Westbury. She read it there under the eye of her uncle and cousin, and neither of them suspected the emotion it aroused, the change in her life, in all their lives, it might bring about.

“ Your correspondence seems very interesting ? ” Sylvia remarked.

Ada did not answer, did not even hear her. She was absorbed in her letter. This was it,—

"My dear Pupil,—I am just as ready to help you now as three or four years ago (which is it?). I did not write till I saw what I could do. There is a Lady Grey living in Altonshire who wants a governess or rather a companion for her daughter, who is sixteen. I wrote to her about you; dubbed you Miss Knight, and endowed you with all the necessary qualities and accomplishments for educating her daughter. She has agreed to engage you on my recommendation without a personal interview, and would be glad if you would arrive at Kingscourt on the 1st. prox. The most direct route will be for you to come through London. I will meet you at the Euston Station at any hour you name, and see you off to Kingscourt. And now do not think me impertinent if I ask you have you considered what a disagreeable life a governess's is? Of course you know best what is necessary for you. I must warn you that Lady Grey is not a pleasant person. Her husband, Sir Trevor, is as good a fellow as I know. Let me hear from you soon.

"Your sincere friend,

"CHARLES WESTBURY."

CHAPTER XIV.

"COME WHAT COME MAY."

So from the region of visions Ada's scheme had entered into actual existence. All difficulties were gone, every thing simple and easy.

"Who is your correspondent!" asked Mr. St. George carelessly, just as Ada had mentally performed the journey to Kingscourt and was being received by Lady Grey, to whom she gave hard, pinched features and a shrill voice.

Ada's mind was so active, everything was so real to her now, that she replied with readiness,

"Mrs. Bruton."



As she answered, a plan for getting away from Oaklands came into her head.

"It is not like her writing," said Sylvia, glancing at the letter, which was open in Ada's hand.

"No, because her husband has written it for her." As she said this, she folded it quietly up.

"She is in London now," she continued, "and wants me to go to her for two or three days at the beginning of next month."

Mr. St. George was silent. He was not at all desirous that Ada should be in communication with the outer world, but he did not see as yet what opposition he could offer.



"You cannot go up to London alone," said Sylvia.

As she was tied to Oaklands and no one invited her, she did not think it would be at all correct for Ada to go alone anywhere !

"It is a very expensive journey," said Mr. St. George. He had discovered, as he thought, an excellent impediment.

"I can afford to pay for my journey out of my own pin-money," said Ada quietly.

She had that feeling of determination to carry her point which is a herald of success.

What could her uncle say ? He feared to draw the bow-string too tight. It would be very awkward if it snapped. Any denial of her personal gratifications might arouse resentment, and resentment might lead to unjust suspicions and malice. When you thwart a woman, she is sure to revenge herself in some spiteful way. So Mr. St. George, after these reflections, congratulated himself on having so kind a heart, and said with apparent interest,

"I dare say the change will be pleasant for you. How long are you asked to stay ?"

"Only a few days."

"At the beginning of next month—oh !—I think I can accompany you to London."

This attention of her uncle's was rather appalling ! What if he carried his politeness so far as even to see her safe in the care of Mrs. Bruton ? This invention of Ada's did not seem quite so happy now, as it brought with it many complications. Mr. Westbury, too, was to meet her at the station. She felt very puzzled for a minute, but like a flash an expedient occurred to her. She would let Mr. Westbury meet her. Her uncle had never

seen Mrs. Bruton's husband; she would introduce Mr. Westbury as Mr. Bruton; and if her uncle still wished to go with her to her friend's house, Mrs. Bruton could be conveniently out when they arrived. If this idea had not occurred to Ada, a hundred others would have come, for her resolution was now so fixed that her mind sprang forward to meet every difficulty. If we say, *it must be*, facts wear a different aspect from that which they do when we say, *it shall be attempted*. The human will is powerful, and it is only an idiot who opposes his "*must*" to impossibilities.

Sylvia was fired with a desire for London novelties, and was already actively engaged in making a mental list of commissions for Ada, which if executed would give ample occupation for her three days' visit! She also had a vision of persuading her father to take her to town too; of being introduced to Ada's friend Mrs. Bruton; of making such an impression on her at their first meeting that Mrs. Bruton would relinquish her foolish fancy for Ada, and replace it with a permanent friendship for her!

These thoughts somewhat consoled Sylvia for her father's ready consent to Ada's departure. She even asked her what sort of woman Mrs. Bruton was.

"She is very fair," answered Ada, "with golden hair and very pleasing manners; I do not think I can describe her any better."

"And Mr. Bruton?"

"He is—"

She checked herself with quick presence of mind; she was going to describe the real Mr. Bruton, but she went on with a description of Mr. Westbury, as nearly as she could remember him.

"He is a tall, slight man, with a very pale face and grey hair."

"Then he is much older than his wife?"

"Yes, much."

Ada wrote to Mr. Westbury, telling of her dilemma and of the way she had found out of it. She said she would accept the situation at Lady Grey's and did not mind disagreeables. Any life she thought better than her present stagnant unhappiness.

The week before Ada's departure flew by. No week in her life had ever been so swift-winged. There was all the excitement of expectation and the unacknowledged fear of the unknown.

A man rushes into a new scene with confidence and vigour and without one backward glance. A woman sees lurking in the saddest landscape which she leaves, some beauty which she may not find in the future.

The dreariness of Oaklands seemed to disappear in those few days. The woods had new charms for Ada; each tree was a record of some thought which might find no place in the new world she was going into. The day before she left, Ada bid good-bye to her father's and mother's grave. She did not think that if her father could see her, this act of hers could pain him.

If the spirits of the dead are with us, surely they have a wiser, deeper insight into things than when in life, and are not shaken by weak bodily fears. They would not have us oppose our nature, and by a falsely directed control stunt our growth. This thought was strong in Ada's mind as she walked back to the house.

She found Sylvia looking very cross because Ada had delayed assisting her in packing, for Sylvia had carried her point and was going; her father having come to the

conclusion that as his niece had friends, Sylvia might as well know them, and see whether they could be made useful. Besides this, the surveillance of Sylvia—no doubt she would be with them a good deal—might be useful to give information to him about Ada.


Each had a plan, and dreamt not of each other's; and though the success of one would thwart the rest, each stepped forward as confidently as if there could be no obstacle in the path. It is often the way.

Ada helped Sylvia cheerfully. Her feelings towards her were softened. The approaching absence made the worries of home seem smaller, and inexperience of what was to be, made her doubt if she had not magnified her troubles. Objects look smaller from a distance, and Ada, in imagination far away already, reduced in mental vision the disagreeables she lived amongst. At dawn they were all up and away. It was a lovely morning—one of those mornings that make one vow never to lie abed again at that hour; a vow that is always broken! Truly, as you taste the freshness of morning when the sun wakes all the earth from its sleep, you feel as if a hundred lives were needed to know nature in all its loving aspects.

Ada was very silent as they drove to the station. The waking twitter of the birds in the hedges seemed to say good-bye; the trees to wave farewell with their arms.

It is a glorious time in our life when everything has language; when the little flowers speak, and the great hills; when by reason of our faith, everything struggles to be more beautiful and more true. We are sovereigns then, crowned with hope and clothed in courage.

Once fairly on the road, Ada marvelled at herself, how she had stepped out of her humdrum life, and had chosen a path which might lead she knew not where. But she



had no fear, she only longed to be quite settled, and to have entered on her new duties, whatever they might be, and so regain the mental calm which would always be a necessity to her, and which at present seemed far distant.

Sylvia was full of plans for sight-seeing in London. She had no doubt Mrs. Bruton would take them about ; and Ada found it very difficult to fix her attention and give reasonable answers.

At last they arrived at Euston, and Ada looked anxiously from the carriage window. It was natural she should be eager to see her friend's husband, was it not ? Mr. Westbury was there, looking much older, but it was the same kind, quiet face.

Ada sprang out, and lest she should make any mistake if she delayed, she introduced him at once as Mr. Bruton to her uncle and cousin. He helped the latter very skilfully out of the carriage, and won her good graces at once.

So far, everything was just as Ada hoped, and it surpassed her expectations when Mr. St. George said in his most polite tone to Mr. Westbury,

"My niece is in such good hands, I need not accompany her to Mrs. Bruton's. My daughter and I will hope to call to-morrow, and make Mrs. Bruton's acquaintance. Park Lane, I think ?"

Mr. Westbury assented. Ada shook hands with them, and they turned away.

"Now," said Mr. Westbury, when they were seated in the cab, "we are not going to Park Lane, but to my sister's in Gower Street; a much more humble locality!"

Ada felt a little awkward in the first moment of security. The reaction of her nervous courage and excitement was felt ; she could not speak.

Mr. Westbury understood at once, and said laughingly,

"By the way, what a talent for story-telling you have developed! When you were my pupil at Brussels, I never suspected that tendency!"

She half laughed, then it seemed possible that he was in earnest, for she had said many things that could not be called true!

"You don't think all this very bad of me?"

She had been so alone; there had been no one to ask, no one to consult, and she felt a sudden wish to know how all this looked to an outsider. If she had not quite made up her own mind, she would not have invited any one's opinion.

"I said that as a joke; every one has a right to act as they think best, I suppose; and if we can't get to dry ground except by walking through mud, I think we must do it. There is an outer and an inner truth—the truth relative to your own soul, and the truth relative to people who are no more to you than a chair or table. Sometimes the one must be sacrificed to the other. You make the choice according to your strength of belief in yourself, or in something which is not quite yourself, but something higher."

Leaving Ada to form what conclusions she liked from what he had said, he added, "What about your Greek? Have you forgotten it all?"

"No, but I shall not be required to teach it at Kings-court, shall I?"

"No. Don't alarm yourself, but I am afraid you have forgotten all about it."

"I think I remember a good deal, but I have not been studying it lately."

"What have you been reading?"

"Kant and Swedenborg and those sort of people."

"Philosophy! And yet you had not enough of your own to bear your life at home, eh?"

He looked at her in his kind way, but with a little laugh of ridicule in his eyes.

Ada coloured.

"Those writers make one think a great deal, but I don't think anything we read has much to do with our decisions about our own life."

Mr. Westbury shook his head dissentingly, with a slight smile.

"That was not exactly what I meant," Ada added. "It was rather a silly remark. Somehow, with you I get driven into a corner; and it is like the game of puss, I make a rush to get out of it, and am left standing a fool in the middle!"

"Here we are," said Mr. Westbury, as the cab stopped.

He helped her out and led her upstairs quite eagerly.

"I shall like you to know my sister," he said as they went into the sitting-room.

Miss Westbury was there; a tall, faded looking woman of about forty, with a gentle face and quiet graceful movements. She was very like her brother, and looked quite suited to be the companion of a scholar. She took Ada by the hand, and led her to the fire.

"How cold you are! Fortunately you have three hours to rest and get warm."

Then she took off Ada's hat, as one accustomed to give little attentions to others. Mr. Westbury had disappeared and came back presently with a book in his hand.

"Now," he said, drawing his chair close to Ada's, "let us see if you remember; translate half a page."

"Dear Charles," his sister said, "does Miss Knight enjoy that, do you think?"

Ada quite started to hear herself called by her new name. Had she quite dropped her old identity, and was she another being for the future? It was silly and superstitious, but it gave her an unpleasant feeling, an unreal sensation; as if she had stepped out on a wild moor from a fireside and shelter now afar off.

"I don't care," Mr. Westbury answered, smiling, and looking at his sister in a way that said much for their happy life.

I cannot describe the expression that comes (when they speak to one another), in the faces of those whose natures quite blend. When you see it, you can fancy how easily their lives work together. You sometimes see it between man and wife; sometimes between brother and sister; sometimes between friends. It is rare at all times, and comes of love and a chivalrous reverence for each other's individuality, and a belief in each having had quite good and fine motives through life.

Ada understood it at once, and this little home seemed radiant to her. She thought of Lady Grey as still less "a pleasant person," after this.

"I don't care," repeated Mr. Westbury, "I shall not keep her long. I want to see if she has been quite idle, and whether she is at all fit to teach the young! You forget my responsibility in having recommended her!"

So they construed half a page, and Ada made many mistakes, but was praised by her old master. Then they had luncheon. It was quite simple, but everything was daintily done, as if the mistress did not disdain giving a little of her time to such household details. When luncheon was over it was time to start.

"Good-bye," said Miss Westbury, "I hope you won't hate teaching; I should."

Then she kissed Ada, and added as she did so,
"I do not know why I kiss you, perhaps because you are so pretty and so alone."

Not much womanly tenderness had as yet come to Ada in her life. It was a new and pleasant experience.

When Ada was driving to the station with Mr. Westbury she said,

"How happy you and your sister are ; what a nice life it is ! "

There seemed a moral beauty in it which she desired to look into. Why were they so completely contented ?

"We are happy," he answered. "We are quite satisfied with each other. We like books, we like quiet. Most people would not call it happiness. It is something apart from joy or sorrow."

It seemed an ideal, picturesque life to Ada, and she was quite glad to carry away in her memory this new experience.

"You will tell me how you get on ? " Mr. Westbury asked just before the train started.

Ada nodded.

"Fill up your spare hours with study," he added. "Keep always intellectually ahead of your pupil, and if she is worth anything she will follow."

Then the train moved on.

There was no one in the carriage with Ada ; no one to speculate about, and the country, as she watched it from the window grew more and more dull and monotonous. There was a long and uninteresting journey of five hours, and then the train stopped at Lawnton junction.

A tall footman came up to Ada when she got out and asked if she were going to Sir Trevor Grey's. Having said yes, she found herself patronisingly looked after,

bag and baggage, and conveyed to a carriage that was waiting for her.

As they passed through a small country town, the carriage stopped and picked up a girl, whom Ada guessed to be the lady's maid. There was a general impertinent turned-up look about her face, and she seemed surprised that on her getting into the carriage, Ada did not mistake her for Lady Grey or some member of the family, and address her in an obsequious and conciliatory manner! Some of her liveried friends had no doubt assured her that when in a carriage, she was exactly like one of the Haristocracy!

Finding that Ada did not speak and by some strange coincidence did not seem impressed, she tried to begin a little friendly intercourse.

"You find it cold no doubt after your journey?"

"Yes," Ada answered, smiling slightly, for she was amused.

"You will find Miss Grey very pleasant, I'm sure," continued the Abigail with a condescending air. "but her ladyship holds her 'ead very 'igh."

Ada continued to be amused, but she did not care very much to have a descriptive account of every one from the lips of a servant.

"I suppose that's because she brought all the money," she went on, "for I'm sure she has nothing else to be proud of!"

"It is very good-natured of you to amuse me during this long drive," Ada said quietly, "but I never care to hear about other people's affairs, especially the lady with whom I am going to live."

The maid looked utterly astonished.

"I am sure, mam," she said, "I mean't no offence."

Ada was glad that she had silenced her, but sorry that she had perhaps hurt her feelings, for she had been brought up with infinite consideration for every class, and this was not merely skin deep, for her mind was wide and imaginative.

After a little pause, Ada asked the names of villages they passed through and of any demesne which they saw from the road they drove on. The maid, at her ease again, told her a great many names, which she forgot as soon as she heard them.

As they entered Kingscourt gates, Ada's companion did the honours of the place.

That was a walk on the left which the master had just completed. The wood on the right was full of pheasants, and there was a seat at the top, were you could see the country for miles round. And so, feeling herself very important, she apparently forgot the snub Ada had given her, but was much more respectful in manner.

Kingscourt was an old red-brick house with an ivy-covered tower at one end. I have no knowledge of architecture and cannot say to what period it belonged, but it looked handsome and dignified.

A little dreary, perhaps, for the flower garden was quite at the back, and there were solemn cypresses near the entrance and great oaks which cast a shadow even to the door.

Ada liked the look of it. It seemed a fit dwelling to pass from generation to generation.

A sunny house, with roses and jasmine, should only be for happy days, for the summer hours of life. The home of joy and sorrow, the silent witness of change-ful events, ought to have no frivolous gaiety about it, but a dignified solemnity.

The bell was rung, Ada got out, and was shown into a library. She felt a strange being in a strange land, and her thoughts sprang forward wonderingly to the time when everything around would be familiar and unnoticed.

CHAPTER XV.

"ILL BLOWS THE WIND THAT PROFITS NOBODY."

BEFORE Ada started from London, she had written to her uncle telling him that she had left Oaklands because she was unhappy there. She begged of him not to make inquiries about her, and said if he did not interfere with her, she would in time communicate with him ; but if he sought her, she would take every means to make his search useless. She added that it was far better that he should allow her to go her own way, and that if he did so, much more kindly feeling would exist between them, and that by-and-by he might be glad of it. In writing this letter Ada had placed her hopes in that part of it which truly was likely to have but little effect, and the vague appeal to his good feeling she put in without any aim.

Though it might not appeal to his good feeling, it might touch a stronger element in his nature. A random shot has sometimes more effect than a careful aim.

Sylvia was grumbling at the uncomfortableness of the beds in the hotel, and Mr. St. George was unpleasantly reflecting on the probable amount of the hotel bill, when Ada's letter arrived.

Mr. St. George read the letter through ; looked at Sylvia, then read it through again.

"What is it ?" Sylvia said impatiently. "I see it is Ada's writing ; what has she to say ?"

He looked at Sylvia again without speaking. For a second he suspected her of duplicity, of knowledge of Ada's intention, for it seemed impossible that Ada should have schemed and carried out this plan by herself, but he dismissed the notion at once. Sylvia was too entirely his child to be concerned in any plan which had not palpable advantage to herself as a result.

"Your cousin," he said with a sneer, "has tricked us all; has told a tissue of falsehoods about Mrs. Bruton, and has gone I don't know where—to the devil probably!"

He tossed the letter across the table to his daughter. There is no one more intolerant of deception than one whose life is a perpetual plotting. To be paid in their own coin is unpleasant to forgers.

Sylvia read the letter through and positively gasped at her father so great was her surprise. This independence of action was a wickedness which, much as she disliked Ada, she would have never suspected her of!

"Then, who was that man that met her?" Sylvia at last said.

"How can I tell? You had better write and ask!" her father answered roughly.

"What are you going to do?"

Mr. St. George said nothing. He would have been sorely puzzled to decide at once. One of his guiding rules was never to do anything from impulse; and as in his character his impulses were weak and sometimes good, and his principles always strong and mean, it followed that his life was—what it was.

There is something very irritating in finding one's authority thrown off, when it has been exercised for some time. We feel it even with children, and it is often

not just indignation at the wrong thing done which prompts punishment, but a lower wrath at finding our authority despised. The human soul loves power, and it is only a noble soul that, conscious of its possession, does not misuse it.

With Mr. St. George there were stronger influences at work than mere mortified feeling. He was silent for some time, at last he said ;

“I could track her out in a day.”

“Of course you could,” Sylvia affirmed forcibly.

She had not the least idea whether he could do so or not, but thought it would be soothing to agree with him.

Yes, it would be easy enough to bring Ada back, thought Mr. St. George, but when she was twenty-one he could not compel her to live at Oaklands, and that time was not very distant. True, she seemed ignorant of the freedom the law would give her at that age, but she might appeal to some one who would give her the information and take up her cause ; and one thing, above all others, Mr. St. George objected to and feared, the interference of outsiders. If he did not seek Ada, things seemed simplified at Oaklands. For the three years that remained, his reign there would be absolute ; no opposing voice to anything he might see fit to do. It was true that in this new life, whatever it was, she might marry, most likely she was married already, but that did not entitle her to any money or any power over her property till she was twenty-four, unless he sanctioned her marriage ; and this of course he could not do. It would be wrong of him to do so. She had set the rules of society at defiance and run away ; in his position as guardian he would not be justified in countenancing any marriage which was the result of such an act.

As he thought of this, Mr. St. George felt himself vindicated in the sight of every just-minded man, and looks of approbation resting on him. Supported by this, he continued his reflections more energetically.

Supposing he brought her back and she was not married and did not marry? She would nourish such a spite against him that the moment she was twenty-four she would certainly shake herself free of him; and probably, if she could find a flaw in his trusteeship, would visit it on him unjustly and revengefully.

The most painful thought to Mr. St. George if he let Ada go her own way without further opposition, was that her way might be a pleasant one; and seeing that she had killed his son and ruined his own hopes, it did not seem right to his just soul that she should escape all suffering, and that he could not stand as an inquisitor by the culprit, till she should acknowledge in her misery that she had been guilty, and he just in his judgment!

It was very difficult to decide; for the field of advantages to be derived from Ada's absence was large, and he itched to put in his sickle and reap. Letting a great portion of the land—reducing the number of servants—a great many changes which he had meditated, seemed now near and probable.

Sylvia had grown very impatient during her father's long silence. It seemed such a waste of time to be poked up in a London hotel, when there were all the fascinations of shops and fashions and admiring eyes to be found in the streets. The sooner her father came to some conclusion about this girl, who was always spoiling everyone's pleasure, the better, and she would try and help him to one.

"Well, what are you going to do? For my part I wish she would stay away altogether."

"I don't yet know what I shall do," he answered.

Then he added, with a burst of indignation,

"It is so base and ungrateful of her, it has quite upset me."

Even to his daughter, Mr. St. George never said quite what he thought. A thoroughly deceitful man never drops the mask even to the most intimate.

"Where has she gone? Has she run away with that man who met her?"

The feminine mind always forms conclusions of this kind.

"I dare say—some low blackguard!"

"If I could do her any good," he added reflectively, "I would try and find her at once. If I employed a detective, there would not be much difficulty about it."

"A nice scandal in the family!"

"Yes, dear," said Mr. St. George, grateful for that view of it, "that is the reason I scarcely know how to act, and begin to think it would be almost best not to seek her."

"And you would never know what had become of her!"

This idea was not palatable to Sylvia, for though she had no desire to see her again, she had a great desire to satisfy her curiosity respecting her.

"She tells me she will communicate with me. I cannot be indifferent to the fate of my brother's child; I shall certainly learn in time what has become of her, but I doubt the wisdom of any active measures just now."

He was thinking of what Ada had said at the end of her letter, viz., that he might be glad by-and-by if he

did not interfere with her. This sentence of Ada's bore a different meaning to Mr. St. George's mind than that with which it was written. To him it had the distant and pleasing sound of pounds shillings and pence, which was always sweet to his ear !

"But what will people say if you abandon her?"

"I don't see the necessity of telling the world the true facts of the case. It is always right to shield people at the sacrifice of a little truth. We can say that she has gone abroad with some friends, being much shaken by Sydney's death. If the real facts ever come out and I am condemned for what I have thought it best to do, it will not be the first time I have suffered unjustly."

"No, indeed," said Sylvia consolingly.

There was silence for a little while, and Sylvia revolved in her mind the possible consequences of all this. Bitterly she concluded that Ada was amusing herself, and that she was to go back to the dull life at Oaklands, without even the satisfaction of knowing that Ada was in the same plight.

Suddenly there was light and hope !

"I do not see why you should subject yourself to the remarks of the neighbours and their comments on Ada's absence ; why not let Oaklands, and go abroad?"

Sylvia waited eagerly for his reply. Mr. St. George never allowed himself to be taken by surprise, and though Sylvia spoke his own thought, it did not startle him into an acknowledgment of it.

"Such a thing is not impossible, Sylvia, but it would have to be well thought over. It is not myself or even my child whom I must entirely consider ; I am Ada's guardian and must act in her interests."

After a pause he added,

"It would be pleasant to avoid gossip, and Ada's absence will, no doubt, make a stir in the neighbourhood. An heiress is a being in whom every one is more or less interested, and one they would not willingly let slip. You have yet to learn of how little value is true worth compared to riches."

"Oh! I know well enough—true worth, beauty, or anything else. Wherever I went, it was always, 'How very pretty your cousin is! What beautiful hair, what graceful manners!' I know what it all meant, for I am sure no girl was ever more disagreeable in her manner; and as to her beauty, she has, perhaps, a sort of Italian peasant prettiness, which I don't suppose one of them admire, as it is not the style of beauty to suit English taste."

In granting so much to Ada, Sylvia felt she had been very magnanimous, and had done more than any other woman would have done.

That morning Mr. St. George wrote several letters, called on several house-agents, and at dinner seemed more satisfied with himself and the world; so much so that he took Sylvia to the theatre.

Next day father and daughter returned to Oaklands.

CHAPTER XVI.

“REMOTE, UNFRIENDED.”

“You have not been kept long waiting, I hope, Miss Knight?”

It was Ada's pupil that was speaking, and who had come in after Ada had been about ten minutes in the library.

“No, only a few minutes.”

“Mamma is out, so I must tell you that you've come to teach me.”

Ada looked at Lily Grey very critically. She had quite made up her mind not to like Miss Grey, and had fancied her very different from what she really was. The picture we draw of people or things before we see them is generally exaggeratedly below or above their merit.

Lily was a small, slender girl; she had that very white skin only seen in northern nations; a small featured, childish face and an abundance of fair, straight hair. It was a gentle face, and the mouth was almost weakly sweet in expression. She looked wonderingly at Ada. They were each trying to see in the face of the other what they had to expect. Lily laughed, and said at last,

“I am afraid I am very rude, staring at you, but I thought it was quite an old person who was coming.”

Miss Grey was evidently not formal, and said what she thought. Ada already felt that it might be possible

to like her, but she was terribly alarmed that there should have been such a mistake about her age. Perhaps Lady Grey would not approve of her, and as she could not grow old suddenly, she had visions of being sent off next day, and where should she go? What should she do?

"I hope Lady Grey does not expect me to be old? Mr. Westbury knew my age; how stupid of him not to tell you."

"I don't remember hearing mamma say anything about your age, but I have always had old governesses, so thought you must be old too."

Ada felt immensely relieved.

"You look tired," she added. "You would like to go upstairs and rest; would you not?"

"Yes, very much."

So Lily led the way up many flights of stairs.

"It is a long way for you to go," she said apologetically, "but mamma wants or fancies she wants so many rooms for visitors that she can only spare this one for you."

"I don't mind," Ada tried to say cheerfully, but she was too tired to think of anything but the pleasure it would be to lie down.

Her room was in the tower, with a curiously-shaped little window, which stood in the round of the turret. Many, many years must have gone by since it had been furnished. It had pretty old-fashioned yellow chintz curtains; straight-backed, painted chairs, and a round mirror in an ebony frame over the chimney. Evidently no modernising hand had crept up so high as this room, and it was left in its old prettiness.

"I will leave you now," Miss Grey said.

As she was closing the door she put her head in again and added,

"I was forgetting to tell you that mamma would like to see you in her boudoir after dinner. You will come down and take tea with me before that, will you not?"

"How am I to find my way?"

"Ring your bell and tell the housemaid to show you the schoolroom."

"Thank you."

Miss Grey shut the door and went away.

Ada was very tired, but she had to undo her trunk and change her dress, for the fear of not looking old enough haunted her, and she chose her heaviest-looking dress in which to make her first appearance before Lady Grey.

After this she lay down and looked out of the window. There was a long piece of artificial water beneath the windows, and there were statues on the path by its side. Further off a grass walk between closely trimmed hedges, and at the end another statue. It was a relief to look at the woods beyond, which were too grand for petty decoration.

How strange to be there, so far away from everything that she was accustomed to! Ada wished that the first few weeks in this new home were past. She looked away from the gardens into the blue sky, which was like the face of an old friend. Gradually her eyes closed and she fell asleep. Some bell ringing awoke her. It seemed very late, for it was quite dark. She rang her bell timidly; ringing a bell in a strange house always seems rather an audacious act. The housemaid came and showed her to the schoolroom. Ada found Miss Grey waiting for her.

"Did you fall asleep?"

"I think so. Am I very late?"

"No, I have not waited long. You look quite rested."

There was a soft colour on Ada's cheek; the sort of bloom that a child has after sleep.

"Do you study much?" Ada asked as they sat together at tea.

She had not the remotest idea what was the usual routine of a girl's education, and how she ought to begin. The only thing that could guide her was the recollection of her school rules, and as she had thoroughly disliked them, she did not place much confidence in their application to others.

"Not if I can avoid it. I hate learning."

"That does not sound hopeful," Ada said, laughing.

"What have you been in the habit of doing?"

"Music, French, German, and a number of other things."

"I suppose we shall have to talk French."

"I hate it."

"Not more than I do."

Lily looked surprised. A governess who hated talking French was altogether a phenomenon! She was prepared for astonishing discoveries after this.

"How is that? You talk it well I suppose, and ought not to mind."

"I am afraid I have forgotten it by this time, but that is not the reason I dislike it. I was at school in Brussels for some time, and was so miserable there that I dislike every thing connected with it even now."

"What was your school like?" said Lily, looking very interested; "I have always wanted to go to school."

"There were but two English girls in the school, and

all the others disliked me because I was English. They had all such grown-up manners and mincing ways; the mistresses were so precise and proper; there was much more fuss made if we did anything unladylike than if we told a lie; altogether it was horrible. Perhaps I should have liked an English school better, I don't know. There were such mean tale-telling ways amongst the girls that I could not bear it."

"How different that is from what I thought. I fancied it would be such fun to be among a lot of girls, and to be great friends with one or two. Did you not make any friends there?"

"No, not real friends, but one is not fit to make friends till one is quite old. I don't think I am old enough yet!" she ended smiling.

"What do you mean?"

"You do not know, when you are very young, what you want. You make friends from some silly motive."

Lily did not like this last remark, it sounded like a governess.

"Are we to sit waiting till we are old for everything nice then?"

Lily Grey had unconsciously touched one of the secrets of mortal dissatisfaction; we wait to do great things and to be happy; and by-and-by all such possibilities are in the past.

"No, I don't quite mean that," Ada answered, laughing; "but do you not find that you don't think quite the same way about people now as you did a few years ago?"

"Yes; I wish I did think the same way though." She was thinking that a few years ago she was less clear-sighted about her mother's defects, and was weakly wishing that her blindness was restored. These two

girls had begun their acquaintance by making up a few sentences which would seem polite; and already they found themselves trying to say something which would wake interest and confidence, and which would put them on an intimate footing at once.

Before they had chatted much more, Ada was summoned to Lady Grey. She felt uncomfortable, it seemed so formal to be ordered as if into the presence-chamber of some great magnate. Perhaps she had only exchanged one authority for another, and more unpleasant one. It seemed so puzzling and odd to be treated as an inferior, who could be commanded or found fault with. She was very weary too, and dreaded to face new people. While she thought this, she reached Lady Grey's boudoir.

A very fair woman, still young, lay back in an arm-chair by the fire. As Ada entered she put up her eye-glass and stared at her; then let it drop and said in a cool, almost insolent way, and with a slow bow,

"Will you sit down, Miss Knight."

Ada did so and waited, not feeling inclined to volunteer anything.

"You have seen my daughter, I suppose?"

"Yes, we took tea together."

"Mr. Westbury told Sir Trevor that you have been educated abroad."

"Yes, partly."

"He also said that you were very accomplished, so relying on his judgment, I engaged you without any further inquiry."

She spoke in a patronising way that was very irritating.

"I am not very accomplished," Ada said quietly. If Lady Grey had said anything more as to her powers

she would certainly have stated that she knew nothing at all!

Lady Grey raised her eyebrows in a surprised way. "You are a good linguist, I presume."

"I don't think so. I can speak French and Italian well, and know both languages thoroughly; German I know only grammatically."

"That is a pity; my daughter knows German tolerably well, but I should like her to speak it. You are a musician?"

"I know music well; I do not play."

"Do not play! How extraordinary of Mr. Westbury to recommend you so strongly!"

Here she looked Ada all over with an insolent expression. If Ada had yielded to her impulse, she would have told her that since Mr. Westbury had made such a mistake, she should consider herself free from her engagement to Lady Grey; but the awkwardness of her position stopped her. She could scarcely ask Mr. Westbury again to help her, and as he had told her that Lady Grey was not a pleasant person, he would think her very childish not to bear all this. After all, Lady Grey's impertinent manners could not humiliate her, they could only make herself ridiculous, so with that comforting thought she answered quietly,

"Mr. Westbury knows, I suppose, that it is possible to teach well without being a brilliant pianiste."

"Well, well, you have not the qualifications I should desire for a governess, but since you have come, I am willing to try you for three months. You are very young," she added.

Evidently the black dress had not the effect Ada desired.

"I am almost twenty-one."

"Are you English?"

"Yes."

"You do not look it."

"My mother was an Italian."

"Oh! your parents are not alive?"

These questions were becoming every instant more unbearable. Ada was determined to put a stop to them, but it was difficult for a young girl to silence a woman of the world, who looked on herself as the superior. She felt very nervous, but answered with heightened colour,

"No, they are both dead; but, Lady Grey, if there are any questions respecting me which you think it necessary to ask, please ask them of Mr. Westbury, as they are very painful to me. It may be the custom, but if it is, I think it is a very unpleasant one,"

Ada hurried through what she had to say, but spoke with dignity, for that was a part of her nature, and always came at the right moment.

Lady Grey was silent from surprise. Certainly no governess had ever spoken to her in that way before. She mentally decided that Miss Knight would never suit her, but she could not say so at once.

"You will tell me, please," Ada added, "if there is any particular study you would wish Miss Grey to give much time to."

"I wish her to be very perfect in modern languages, to be a good musician, and to draw; I think she has talent."

Ada smiled a little, she could not help it, it was so thoroughly a young lady's education.

"I cannot teach drawing. As to the languages and music, I think I can undertake them. And now," Ada

added, "would you mind telling me the rules of the house ; when I am expected to appear and not to appear ?"

She felt as if she would like all conversation with Lady Grey to end that night.

"You will breakfast with us ; dine at luncheon-time with my daughter ; take tea with her as you did to-night, and if you like you can of course come to the drawing-room in the evening."

"Miss Grey is much too old to require religious teaching, I suppose ; you have no wishes respecting it, have you ?"

"Oh ! no, except that I should like you to attend church with her generally, as I am not always strong enough to go."

"How awful !" thought Ada. "I think this promises to be rather worse than Oaklands."

"I think if you have nothing more to say, I may go now ?" Ada rose as she spoke.

"No ; I think I have told you all. Good night."

"Good night."

Ada went back to the school-room, smiling a little, Lady Grey's airs were rather laughable, Had she been able to read Ada's thoughts, she would have been rather surprised to find how little awe she had inspired.

Certainly not a pleasant person ; a very unpleasant, vulgar, empty-headed person ! Ada thought. She found Lily still in the schoolroom.

"You still here ! I thought you would have gone to the drawing-room."

"No, it is so stupid there. Papa goes to sleep, and mamma reads novels. Was mamma cross ?"

"No, but I was."

"Why ?"

"Because Mr. Westbury had described me as a wonderful person who knew everything, and Lady Grey was disappointed at finding it was not the case."

"Never mind mamma, that's her way. I really don't want a governess, only a companion, and I am sure you will be much nicer if you are not very learned."

Ada wondered where this girl had acquired her frank, simple manners; she was so different from her mother.

"I am more than sixteen," Lily went on, "I ought to have done learning."

"I have not done learning," said Ada, "and I am nearly twenty-one!"

Lily looked disappointed; she found Miss Knight's views did not quite coincide with hers.

"I should think you knew enough. I don't want to poke over books; I want to enjoy myself."

"Poking over books is enjoyment, I think."

"I wish I could find it so. I like music, do you?"

"Yes, some kinds."

"I want to sing so much, and mamma won't give me lessons, she says I have no voice."

"Let me hear," said Ada, laughing; "I think I could tell." She went to the piano as she spoke.

"Oh! don't send me up and down those dreadful scales; they always make my voice sound horrible. Play Gounod's Serenade, can you?"

"Yes."

So Lily sang, with an execrable French pronunciation, but with a voice like a pretty bird's.

"Well," she said, when she had ended, "tell me the true truth."

"The true truth is, that you have a very pretty, sweet voice, and correct ear. Your voice could be made fuller

and stronger with teaching, I think, and practice. Can't you persuade Lady Grey to give you lessons ? ”

“ No, she would much rather I played well. She says my voice is too poor and that I shall never sing with effect.”

Ada could fancy the sort of voice her mother would like, and what she understood by producing an effect ! Lily's voice was much too delicate and refined to please Lady Grey.

“ We can practise together. I do not know much about singing, but I am fond of it.”

She was sorry that this girl's tastes should not be consulted, and was ready to encourage her in anything she enjoyed. Already she took an interest in her, because there did not seem to be any unreality about her.

Truly, humanity is not so bad if it could be simple. The most foolish of people would be bearable if theirs was only unpretending stupidity, but I suppose they feel somehow their own emptiness and think that they disguise it by an outer covering of gesture and attitude ; which makes them ridiculous, while behind it all we still see the emptiness.

Lily was overjoyed. This was altogether an extraordinary kind of governess ! Her frank admission that there were limits to her knowledge was so unlike those stiff old creatures, who, as if to revenge themselves for their ugliness, placed themselves on an elevated platform of learning, from which they looked down and snubbed all the rest of the world !

“ How kind of you,” Lily said enthusiastically ; “ I am sure I shall like you very much, you are so nice. Mamma would say, if she heard me, that I am like a silly school-girl, and that I ought not to say what I think of people.”

"You might change your mind, and then you would feel awkward, and sorry for being in such a hurry," Ada said laughing.

"But I never think of that."

Lily was one of those girls who thoroughly believe in their first impressions. She never thought it possible to make a mistake, and it would be very long before society taught her to reserve her opinion on any subject.

Ada went to bed that night with very confused thoughts, which physical fatigue made more puzzling. She dreaded her uncle finding her out, and yet her life here at Kingscourt did not promise much. She knew she would like, even love Lily in time, as one might love a simple, docile child, but there could be no deep companionship of thought between them. As to Lady Grey, Ada laughed as she thought how just was the maid's verdict. She recognised all the trivial worry that would arise from being in any relation to a woman of her narrow, vulgar mind. She could quite realise the governess-life she had read of, and which she had thought an exaggeration. A kind of woman, thought Ada, who, if her governess were retiring and kept much to herself, would invade her seclusion and drag her out for her use or convenience; and who, if the governess liked society and were rash enough to come forward at all, would snub her unmercifully and make her feel her dependent position. Of the two courses, Ada preferred the former, and determined that her spare time should be her own, and that she would allow of no interference. Having come to this conclusion, she dropped off to sleep, and had a frightful vision of being conducted back to Oaklands by a body of police!

CHAPTER XVII.

"LABORARE EST ORARE."

WITH what a dazed feeling Ada opened her eyes next morning. It must be very early, she had not heard the workman's bell, and yet the cold light of the winter's morning was coming in. Oh! she knew where she was now. One by one she recognised everything in the room that she had taken note of the previous evening. She was at Kingscourt, beginning a life of her own choosing.

She got up. No one brought her hot water, and it would have required a kind of courage which Ada did not possess to ring and ask for it. So she was very frozen, her hands and feet felt quite lifeless.

Outside, the robin sang its brave little song, as if it were determined to be cheerful in spite of everything. Ada went down. All the passages seemed unfriendly. The housemaid, at her morning work, looked over her shoulder at her, and went on dusting. Ada would have been glad if she had said good-morning! Ada lingered for a moment at the foot of the stairs, looking at a bust, then she took courage and asked if there was a fire anywhere.

"Yes, in the dining-room."

"But I do not know where that is, will you kindly show me?"

The gentleness of Ada's voice made the girl put down her duster and say civilly,

"I will show you, Miss."

They went along a passage, through a swing door, and were in the dining-room.

Yes, that was comfortable, a great wood fire was blazing on the hearth. It was quite a vast room, but a unny old-fashioned screen stood near the fire, and seemed to give a sense of cosiness. There was a high oak wainscoting round the room, which was black with age, and above it hung suits of ancient armour. The ceiling was vaulted like a church, and at one end of the room was a large organ; the whole place had a strange effect—half banquetting hall, half chapel.

Ada sat down by the fire. A few minutes later some one came in; Ada thought it was probably a servant, and did not look round till some one came close to her; it was Sir Trevor Grey.

"Miss Knight, I suppose?" he said, holding out his hand.

Ada took it surprisedly; this was so different from his wife's reception of her.

"The first morning in a strange house is dull, is it not?"

"Very. I did not know which way to turn first till one of the maids directed me. This fire is nice and warm."

"Fire seems like an old friend in the midst of your loneliness," he said, smiling.

Ada looked well at him as he spoke. What a frank face it was! Not handsome, but generations of refinement had given it a courtliness and dignity which supplied its deficiencies. Sir Trevor was a man of the

same school as Colonel St. George, and with him Ada forgot that she was a governess.

A servant brought in the urn, and Sir Trevor said to him—"See that there is a good fire in the schoolroom."

"It is a cold morning, I think," he said turning to Ada; "don't you find it so?"

"Yes, but I am always cold in winter."

"Your friend Mr. Westbury is a distant cousin of mine. What a clever fellow he is!"

"He cannot be separated from his books for a minute. Even during the few hours I was in town, he made me do some Greek with him."

"Are you such a learned young lady as to know Greek?"

"Oh! no," Ada answered, blushing; for it seemed as if she had boasted of her knowledge, though truly it was not intentional. "I learnt a little with Mr. Westbury when I was at school, and he wanted to see if I had quite forgotten it."

"What a generous thing it was of him to undertake the drudgery of teaching at Brussels. You know the circumstances?"

"No."

"He gave every shilling he possessed to get a friend of his out of some difficulty, and for five years had to take to teaching to support himself. Luckily at the end of that time some relation died and left him a small annuity."

There was a rustling of silk, and the presence of Lady Grey made itself felt. She nodded carelessly to Ada and took a chair by the fire.

"How intolerably cold it is, Trevor!" she said to her husband; "I am sure the pipes are not heated."

"Yes, they are."

"Won't you ring for prayers? Lily is late as usual."

"Perhaps, Miss Knight," she added, turning to Ada, "you could induce my daughter to get up a little earlier."

Sir Trevor looked at his watch and smiled. It was already much past breakfast hour.

A chapter of the Bible and an elaborate prayer, full of fine words, in which they expressed to the Almighty the high estimation in which they held him, were read, as is the custom in English families. I fancy that English people think that it lends a certain dignity to them as householders, that a goodly row of servants should come in and listen to family prayers.

Shortly after this, Lily appeared. She went to her mother first, who gave her a cheek to kiss with an air of condescension. Then Lily bid her father good morning in a very different way, as if there were some meaning in the greeting.

"Good morning, Miss Knight," she said, "did you sleep well in that boggy room?"

"Yes, very."

Sir Trevor was less genial before his wife; it was as if some untrue element was in the atmosphere, and a little conventional armour was necessary. Lady Grey looked at Ada scrutinizingly while she talked to the others. She did not know what to think of her. Here was a surprising kind of governess! Very young and yet with a self-reliance of manner which seemed to make patronage impossible. This quiet and ease had not been gained from fashion or worldly ways, for Lady Grey saw plainly that Miss Knight was simple and inexperienced. She was surprised that nothing seemed to impress Ada;

neither the magnificence of her house and furniture, nor the grandeur of her own dress and manner, and that there was no particular tone of deference when Miss Knight spoke to her—intimating admiration or respect. She did not think she would suit, but just at present it was impossible to dismiss her, as she was expecting visitors and could not look for another governess.

Breakfast was over and Lily left the room. Ada was following when Lady Grey stopped her.

"I wish to tell you, Miss Knight," she said, "that I should like you to keep my daughter as much as possible with yourself. I expect my house to be full of visitors in a few days, and do not wish Lily to be distracted from her studies. At her age it is important that she should not be allowed to consider herself anything but a child."

"At her age," put in Sir Trevor, who was standing close to them, "it will be rather difficult to put your views into her head. She knows she is not a baby."

"Ah!" Lady Grey said languidly, "gentlemen do not know anything about the education of girls! you understand me, Miss Knight."

It seemed so strange to Ada to be spoken to in this way; to be expected to exercise authority over a girl who was only a few years her junior. She had not at all realised what it was to be a governess. It was a very funny sensation.

"I will try to make her like study," was all she could say.

"Remember," Lady Grey continued, "that I wish Lily to speak modern languages with great fluency. She is much inclined to neglect her music, and that I consider an essential to a girl in her position."

Sir Trevor moved away with what Ada thought a gesture of impatience.

"I shall do my best," Ada answered, and then she moved as if to go.

"We shall be very pleased to see you in the drawing-room in the evenings."

Ada thanked her with a mental determination not to avail herself of the permission.

"What kept you so long?" asked Lily, who was feeding her canary in the schoolroom, when Ada came in.

"Lady Grey was talking to me."

"What wonderful instructions did she give you about me?"

"She wants you to learn a great deal, and I feel rather puzzled."

"Why?"

"Because I have only taught myself a little, and have never taught any one else, and do not know how to begin."

Lily laughed and chirped to her canary.

"One dreadful thing *must* happen, we must talk French always. I am very sorry, because I hate it."

"Not *all* day; if we do I shall never say anything I mean; only sentences out of the dialogue-book,—Il fait beau aujourd'hui, etc.!"

"Well, the whole forenoon, will that do?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Will you take up some study—Logic, Mathematics, Mineralogy—anything you fancy, and work hard at it with me?"

"It sounds very dreadful, but I'll try, though I cannot see what good it will do me."

"I find I grow stupid, unless I work at something that requires my full attention while I read; something

that requires going over and over again to understand it quite, and feel that I have learnt a little. Besides, I do think it is nice to see a little way into things; it interests one in nature, in life, and makes one think."

"Have you come to the end of what I am to do?"

"Oh! no," Ada answered laughingly, "I want you to read a quantity of Greek and Roman history, and as much of the classics as we can lay hands on in English, till your brain is quite full of it all. Those people did such fine things, we must be better for knowing about them."

"Oh! there are so many other things to study," she added enthusiastically. "Every step I take into books is like travelling in a beautiful land."

Lily looked at her wonderingly.

"And what about our singing?"

"Ah! there shall be a condition attached to that."

"What is it?"

"That you shall get up and practise the piano for an hour every morning before breakfast."

Lily's face fell.

"I don't like that at all."

"What is the good of lying in bed, it makes one so dull and lazy all day?"

"What is the good of practising the piano when I hate it, shall never play well, and mean to leave it off as soon as ever I am old enough not to be bothered."

If Ada had said what she thought, she would have agreed with her, but how could she, when Lady Grey had laid such stress on this accomplishment being necessary "to a girl in her position?" So she was silent.

"I know you think so too," Lily said; "and since you are nice enough not to say what you do not think, I'll practise if you like,—there!"

"You can console yourself by knowing that it will be useful to you when you sing. You cannot always have some one to play for you, and it is horrible to hear people spoil their singing by making, *through blunders*, the accompaniment the most important part. There is always a mechanical part in all art which must be acquired before you can give free expressions to any high feeling."

So they made plans how to spend the days, and Ada did not feel hopeless about herself or Lily.

In much the same way that she had taught herself from Kingsley's suggestions, did Ada try to guide Lily's reading. She had learnt that the highest task of education is to awake self-teaching; that it is only when a mind inquires and desires to know, that it learns, and that all one mind can do for another is to suggest; unless the suggestions are taken into the soul and made its own, not another's—learning is worthless. What is the use of striking a flint if the spark falls on nothing that will ignite?

Ada soon found out that governessing was not an occupation which was by any means adequate to her wants, but it was a definite employment, and the compulsory filling up of so many hours in the day made those that remained to herself to spend, more precious, and not a dreary time, difficult to drag through.

Everything has in it the element of growth. Only give a tiny twig encouragement and it spreads into a great tree. From idleness and discontent grow more idleness and discontent. From work grows work, and as the minutes are filled by earnest occupations we are ever ready with fresh vigour for the coming minutes.

Ada read more and in greater earnest than she had

ever done. From her work with Lily arose questionings and discussions, for which very often she felt her own incapacity, and so she was ever struggling to be ahead of Lily so as to be some help to her. Her life was not what she wanted it to be, and yet it satisfied her somewhat; it seemed to be fitting her for the future; it was not bright, but it was earnest; it was raised from a cowardly acceptance of circumstances into a development of her individuality; from being shaped by time and tide, into guiding life through the channels of her own power.

"The secret of culture is to learn that a few great points steadily reappear, alike in the poverty of the obscurest farm and in the miscellany of metropolitan life; and that these few are alone to be regarded. The escape from all false ties; courage to be what we are; a love of what is simple and beautiful; independence and cheerful relations,—these are the essentials, these and the wish to serve, to add somewhat to the well-being of men."

Days and weeks passed and Ada heard nothing of her uncle. She could never quite get free herself from the dread of his appearing, though his continued silence gave her some confidence. The house became full of visitors, but Ada did not see much of them, except occasionally at lunch; but Lady Grey never introduced her to any one. The men looked wonderingly at her, and never lost an opportunity of opening the door for her, or handing her anything at table that she might want. The women gave her a stare, and then seemed to forget she was there. Ada understood how much alone she could feel in a house full of people; with the constant sound of voices through the passages, and the noise of carriages and horses coming and going as they went out to hunt or visit. Lily was not much away from Ada even now.

"I don't care about the people that are here," she said one day to Ada; "they are stuck up and disagreeable."

She attached herself to Ada from the first in a strange way. She was quite simple in her likes and dislikes.

Sometimes in the drawing-room if she got near a dull or patronising person, she would only answer in monosyllables, and as soon as she could, would slip off to Ada and chatter for an hour, giving her a ridiculous account of every one and mimicking any eccentricity.

"I wish you would come to the drawing-room in the evening sometimes," Lily said one night.

"If you find it stupid, I should find it doubly so."

"It would not be amusing for you, but we could laugh at it afterwards."

"How bad it would be of me to laugh at your mamma's guests," but she smiled as she spoke.

Ada began to see that she had not impressed Lily much with her dignity as a governess, but that she seemed to look on her as a girl like herself, who could share her amusements, and who knew perhaps more than she did. It was much pleasanter so, than to have been forced into assuming a sternness and authority which would have been unnatural.

"Would you like to know how funny they are downstairs? There is an old dowager countess of something whom mamma makes a great fuss about; a horrid old thing, she is playing whist with the idiotic member for the county, who I am sure does not know what he is in Parliament for!"

"That's better than thinking he is there for great personal merit. Go on, there must be two more at the whist table."

"The clergyman and his wife are the two others, I suppose you have seen them in church. Mamma is sitting on the sofa, fanning herself, though it is horribly cold ! On her right—no, on her left, is a young man with a red fat face, his mouth wide open, a drooping moustache, drooping eyes, drooping lips, and he is talking a great deal in a drooping way ; I don't know what he is saying and I have an idea he does not know himself !"

"And Sir Trevor ?"

"Oh ! dear old papa, he is looking so bored, having a political discussion with Mr. Farecliffe. Papa wants his after-dinner nap so much, and is standing up by the fire to prevent himself falling asleep."

"And you ? What do you do ?"

"Mamma drives me to the piano, and I play and no one ever listens."

"Do you know," she added quickly, "papa heard us practising, and he asked me to-night if you sang."



"Oh ! please don't let them think I sing, Lily ; I could not endure being brought in to sing."

"It's all right. I made a face at papa, and afterwards I told him that you never sang before people, so he won't say anything. How relieved you look ! I wish I could sing beautifully. Perhaps I could wake some feeling in those stupid people."

"There are sometimes visitors whom you like, are there not ?"

"Yes, when Frank, my brother, is at home. He is coming next week and we shall be merry. It is always fun when he is here. You must not sit in the schoolroom then or in your room all the evening."

"You will enjoy yourself just as much without me, and I don't care for strangers."

"You are nearly as young as I am, why should you not have some fun?"

"I don't care for it. I am very happy."

"You don't look happy, you have such a sad face."

Ada did not answer and Lily added,

"Do I tease you? I ought not to make remarks, but I like you so much."

"You may say what you like," Ada answered, smiling at her perfectly childish manner. "I don't think I am sad, but I sometimes feel rather lonely, because there really is no one in the world that cares much about me."

Lily looked at her shyly and fondly.

"I suppose you think me silly to say that I care for you when I have only known you for a month, but I do, I really do, I can't help it. You do not seem like a governess, but like some one I have known for ever so long."

As she said this, Ada felt a little self-reproachful from the consciousness that she could never care for Lily quite equally. It was the feeling of the stronger nature towards the weaker; it loves the weaker, but in a theoretical way.

In Lily's nature there was a strong element of reverence; that power of recognising a nature higher than her own: this gave sweetness and beauty to a mind which had not much power or depth. She was a character easy to read. Ada knew exactly what to expect. Years of life with her would not develope any unpleasant or unthought-of trait. She might have been more interesting if there had been some latent bad quality in her disposition. It would have given force to her character. There would have been something to break a lance with, something to try her own strength by.

Every day Lily's fondness for Ada seemed to increase.

From the latter's influence over her, it was easy to make her study, but books did not teach them the same things. In Lily's mind, the thoughts of others always kept their own light; in Ada's they changed under the light of her own intellect.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“SHE’S BEAUTIFUL; AND THEREFORE TO BE WOO’D.”

FRANK GREY’S arrival was announced to Ada by Lily one evening, who was in high delight at the event. Ada saw him at luncheon the following day. Of course Lady Grey did not help her son to an understanding of who Ada was, but Lily in her simple way said,

“Miss Knight, this is my brother Frank.”

Lady Grey thought it was giving a governess a quite needless prominence to introduce her to any one.

She raised her eye-glass and looked at her son. She was curious to know what he thought of Miss Knight, and fancied she might read his opinion in his face. He rose and bowed, then looked towards his mother in surprise. This governess was so unlike the old frights that had always been at Kingscourt before!

Ada was curious about Frank Grey. Lily’s affection for and pride in him interested her. She had always wished for a brother, and was anxious to see if he fulfilled her ideal of such a relationship, but she showed no sign of interest and went through luncheon as silently as ever. Her manner had changed very much since those days at Homburg. Kingsley, if he had seen her, would have been more than satisfied with her reserve! Time and uncongenial society had taught her a coldness of manner which he foolishly expected when the world was quite

new to her and her own nature full of uncontrollable brightness.

Frank Grey was a young barrister. He had read a good deal, had considerable self-confidence, thought he discovered in himself a decided talent for making an impression in society; was good-natured and anxious to please, and moreover had a slight tinge of vulgarity in his mind which his manner seldom betrayed.

"When are these cousins coming, Lily," he asked "and how do you mean to amuse them?"

"I don't know, ask mamma."

"Eh, mother, when do they appear?"

"This evening."

"Am I expected to make myself very agreeable?"

"I suppose you always do that," his mother said in an affected tone.

"Well, I don't know. I can talk, but it is a great bore sometimes; and what are you to do with people in a country place?"

"In a place like this, with plenty of horses and beautiful grounds, I consider it my visitors' own fault if they are not amused. The Miss Cathcarts, who are coming, live in quite a small villa by the sea. The novelty of a place like Kingscourt would alone amuse them, I should fancy."

Lady Grey evidently placed much confidence in her possessions.

"That reminds me, mamma," said Lily, "of when I was a small child and brought little Eva Jones to see my doll's house. I was quite sure it would give her great pleasure to see a toy she did not possess, and I was horribly surprised when I found that she seemed to think it more fun racing about with a broken wheelbarrow at home."

Lady Grey did not see the point of Lily's little anecdote.

"My dear child," she said languidly, "what do you mean? What have broken wheelbarrows got to do with the Miss Cathcarts?"

Frank laughed.

"How sharp you are growing, Lily," he said. "Is that the result of your studies?"

He looked at Ada as if he expected her to answer. She smiled and thought it rather good-natured of him to wish to draw her into the conversation. A few minutes later Ada left the room. As soon as the door had closed Frank turned to Lady Grey.

"I say, mother, what a pretty girl the governess is?"

"Is she not?" said Lily enthusiastically, "but mamma thinks her quite ugly, I believe."

"You exaggerate, Lily; I merely say I do not admire her."

"But I do, which is much more to the point," said Frank. "I dare say she will appreciate it more!"

Lady Grey took no notice of his remark, but in a minute said to Lily,

"I think you had better go and practise; there will be several people at dinner to-night and you must play in the evening."

"Anything I play is good enough for them, if you only knew how little notion of music any of them have! I am going, but *not* to practise!" and she went away laughing.

"My dear Frank," said Lady Grey when she was gone, "how can you talk in such a silly way before your sister? She is quite infatuated about Miss Knight, and will probably tell her what you have said."

"Why should she not? I have no objection to Miss Knight's knowing that I admire her. It will be a most delicate compliment coming though Lily!"

"Miss Knight has hitherto been very quiet. Don't turn her head. It may be very amusing for you, but I do not wish to look for another governess."

"What a state of mind you are getting yourself into! Suppose I were to fall in love with her, I should think she is pretty enough for any man."

There was a twinkle of mischief in his eye, for he knew how his mother would receive such a suggestion.

"A penniless governess! Are you mad, Frank? You seem to have picked up strange notions in London. If I could believe you so silly, I would dismiss Miss Knight to-morrow."

Frank burst out laughing.

"I am not quite such a fool as I look, or as you seem to think me, mother. I should as soon think of marrying as of cutting my throat—I'm blessed if I know which is the worst—but I dare say I may amuse myself with your pretty governess. Poor girl, why should she not have the excitement of a flirtation? It must be precious dull for her here."

"Don't let your attention to Miss Knight make her forget her place, for if it does she must go. Let me warn you that there is nothing more dangerous than flirting with a girl beneath you in position. If she is pretty and clever, she will entangle you before you know where you are."

"Do you know that from experience? Eh, mother?"

Lady Grey flushed angrily.

"I brought your father money, which makes the case quite different. What would be your father's position,

what would be your position without my money? My wealth made me quite your father's equal."

"How did you pick up this Miss Knight?" said Frank, feeling that the conversation was becoming unpleasant.

"Your father heard of her through Mr. Westbury. I should never have chosen her."

"I don't suppose you would."

"She seems, however, a quiet attentive girl, but I fancy she thinks a good deal of herself and does not like interference."

"Who does not like interference?" asked Sir Trevor, coming in at that moment."

"The new governess, father."

"Who would? If I were a governess I certainly should not like it."

"Mother and I are discussing her appearance," said Frank, pushing his chair back from the table. "I think she is a very pretty girl."

"So she is," said Sir Trevor, helping himself to some beef, "and a very unassuming, gentle girl."

"I have my doubts about her, Trevor," said his wife. "It is so strange, she seems to have no friends. She never receives letters, except an odd one from Mr. Westbury."

"How do you know they are from Westbury?"

"I know his writing, and her letters lie on the breakfast table."

"And is a number of letters a guarantee of a girl's respectability?" Sir Trevor asked in a jesting tone, for his wife's arguments seemed rather ridiculous, and he thought it better to laugh her out of them, as they might be hurtful to the girl.

"No," she answered impatiently, "but no one can be

entirely without friends unless she has done something to merit neglect."

"How you run on, Fanny!"

His tone was quite angry, he could not help thinking what a silly woman his wife was—he had thought that many times I fear—

"I wish," he continued, "that you would not imagine evil. You have no reason for thinking Miss Knight anything but a well-conducted, ladylike girl, with a good deal more brains than most women."

"It is quite natural that I should be anxious about the character of any one who is the companion of my daughter!"

"Yes, but as I had full particulars about Miss Knight from a man I respect extremely, there is no room for ill-natured scandal."

"I cannot shut my eyes to things in my own house, and to my husband I feel at liberty to speak. I have noticed that Miss Knight shirks going to church, and that is strongly against her."

"We have no right to interfere with any one's religious views, as Lily is much too old to be under a governess' instructions in such matters. Miss Knight conforms to our habits, and attends household prayers; that is all we can ask her to do."

Frank was standing by the window smiling; he whirled round now.

"If it would give you any satisfaction, mother, to see Miss Knight receive letters, I'll write to her this very evening and post it at Laneboro'!"

His father laughed, but Lady Grey could not get over her irritation so quickly.

"Your father knows best, no doubt, as all men do

when they are infatuated about a girl. I only hope that my suspicions may not prove correct."

This, in a tone which belied her words somewhat.

Lady Grey now left the room, rustling her dress in a hostile manner.

"My mother seems to think that you are in love with Miss Knight, father!" Frank said in that light way which showed he hated to be bothered with family squabbles, "and she seems to think I am going to follow your example."

"Well, there is considerably more danger for you, Frank."

"A fellow does not fall in love with every pretty girl he meets," he answered, with that assumption of worldly indifference which is a young man's favourite habit.

"I should like you to avoid annoying your mother," said Sir Trevor gravely, "by showing Miss Knight too much attention. Of course, I know you will never be wanting in courtesy to her, but anything more than that would render her position in this house very unpleasant. A governess' life is hard enough for a sensitive girl, and no man of honour ought to make it harder for her, simply for his own amusement."

Sir Trevor, as if ashamed of having given the subject so much importance, got up, and coming to the window, said,

"Do you miss the trees I've cut down? You youngsters never notice anything!"

"Except a pretty face, father," he answered mischievously.

All this conversation about Miss Knight invested her with considerable interest for Frank. His mother

seemed spiteful to her, and his father afraid of her influence; she must be rather an uncommon girl, and certainly she was unusually pretty. His vacation might be amusing this time. He would soon find out all about Miss Knight's antecedents, why she got no letters, and looked so down on her luck. He flattered himself he could worm secrets out of any woman; at least he had succeeded pretty well so far, and he did not suppose he could fail with Miss Knight.

I dare say my mother is right, thought he, and she is making a fool of the old man; those demure sort of girls are always deep; not that she will do Lily any harm, she is such a baby.

So he began to lay schemes for visits to the school-room. Lily would help him, she was such a child he could always do what he liked with her. Even already he had visions of how Miss Knight's face would brighten at his entrance, and how she would grow livelier. It must be slow for her, he thought, pityingly, for there was a great deal of easy good nature in him; a good-nature which was generally indulged when it flowed in the same channel with his own desires.

Sir Trevor's sage advice had not made much impression, for while Frank walked about the park and listened to his plans for improvement, he was wondering from time to time when he would see Miss Knight again, and he determined to study her very carefully and to try and make out what sort of girl she was.

"Are you going out with your mother?" asked Sir Trevor as they walked back to the house.

"I don't think so."

"I am going to Smith's farm; he wants me to do something to the house and I must see exactly what it

is. The roan mare is doing nothing, if you wish to ride."

"Thanks, I think I'll take a crack at the rabbits this afternoon ; I suppose there are plenty of them."

"Too many, I wish I could get rid of them."

When Lady Grey went out to drive and Sir Trevor had gone to Smith's farm, Frank made preparations to go out shooting, but in that indolent, undecided way which showed that he would be very glad of any pleasant interruption.

Presently Ada and Lily, having the house to themselves as they imagined, began their practice of singing, and the schoolroom being beneath Frank's room, he was edified by Do—re—mi perseveringly repeated, with occasional pauses and laughter.

Down went the gun, Frank stopped filling his pocket with cartridges, and with a relieved expression of face, he went down to the schoolroom.

"I think I could do that," he said coolly as he opened the door.

"Oh, what a bother !" exclaimed Lily, "I thought you were all out."

"Don't distress yourself, dear ; the old people have departed, and I don't count. I thought you knew that by this time."

"Well, it does not much matter about you, certainly."

"I wish you could persuade Miss Knight of that, she looks angry."

He looked at Ada with such mock fear in his face that she laughed.

"I don't think we shall get on very well with our practice if you are here," she said, "but as it is not a compulsory study, it does not much matter."

What a sweet, rich voice she has when she speaks, thought Frank, and how young she looks when she smiles !

" Could I not join ? " he said, I should make such a good pupil, and I have been told I have a very fine voice ! "

" You believe what you are told ? "

" Of course he does if it is flattering," said Lily ; " he is a most conceited wretch."

" A sister's judgment," said Frank.

Here Ada got up from the piano.

" You are not going to try my voice, Miss Knight ! "

" No, I am no judge of voices."

She began to think that Mr. Grey might find the schoolroom an agreeable lounge every day, and it must not be made too pleasant to him. She must not forget that she was a governess. What would Lady Grey think of her giving singing-lessons to her son ! She smiled as she thought of it, and taking up her work, she sat in the window.

Even in those few minutes Frank saw that it would not be so easy as he imagined to flirt with the new governess.

" If you were any good," said Lily to her brother, " you would try and persuade mamma to give me singing-lessons."

" Why, you have no more voice than a crow, child."

" Ask Miss Knight."

" She says she is no judge," he said, looking at Ada meaningly.

" Of my pupils, I am always ; at all events, as I am a governess, I am entitled to suppose myself a judge."

"Let us hear your voice, Lily."

"Oh, no! you do not know anything about it. Can't you believe Miss Knight?"

"I am not sure that I can."

Ada did not apparently hear his remark.

"Why not sing for your brother?" she said gently.

Without more ado Lily sang "Bid me discourse," and Ada, in her desire to show her off to advantage, helped here and there with her own rich, powerful voice; not thinking at all of herself, but wanting to give the spur to Lily.

"What a splendid voice you have, Miss Knight!" Frank said at once when the music stopped.

"Your sister was singing," she answered.

"Oh, yes, I know; I was going to say that Lily has a very nice voice, but I remarked yours because I did not know you sang. Excuse me."

"I knew there was no use singing for him," said Lily petulantly.

"Yes, there is, and if you want lessons, I'll get round the madre."

"That is a good boy," said Lily, all smiles again.

"Where did you learn, Miss Knight?"

"I had a few lessons at school."

"I have always thought," said Frank, leaning back in his chair and looking very much at his ease, "that girls must have great fun at school. Had you?"

How skilfully he was leading her to talk of herself!

"Why should it be more amusing than a boy's school? A great deal of strict routine; lessons to be learnt; hours kept; all the same enmities about nothing, and instead of having a 'free fight' as boys do, girls nurture their dislikes and are much meaner."

She had not given him any personal experiences, or the slightest opening for farther questions, but he would not give up without extracting some grain of information.

I suppose you disliked it very much. How long were you a victim ? ”

“ I disliked it, yes,” she answered vaguely, getting up and putting all the music in its place.

“ Too late for more practice,” she said to Lily. “ What are you going to do ? ”

“ I’ll go out. Will you come, Frank ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered eagerly ; “ I don’t know what to do with myself.”

“ Then I am free, Lily,” Ada said. “ Good-bye till tea time.”

“ You are not coming ? ” Frank asked in an amazed tone. “ I thought we were all going out together.”

She shook her head, smiled, and went away.

“ What a rum girl that is ! ” Frank said when the door closed.

“ She is a very nice girl.”

“ Oh ! I’ve no doubt of it. The reigning favourite is always ‘ a very nice girl ’ with you women, till she does something or other to annoy you ! ”

“ Don’t talk nonsense, Frank. I’ll put on my hat and come out.”

“ Well, look alive.”

How funny that governess is, thought Frank, when he was alone. I think she is afraid of me. Why should she go away ? All the old devils of governesses that Lily has had before, used to look on my coming to the schoolroom as a great event. Why that Miss Evans, who was any age, used to giggle and blush like a girl of

eighteen when I talked to her, the old fool ! But this girl is so confoundedly cool. She did not like my quoting her against herself. I caught her there. I dare say we shall be very good friends by-and-by. I'll try talking to her more seriously. Perhaps she thinks herself clever and despises frivolous conversation. It is a great thing to know how to humour women.

"Holloa, there you are," he said, looking up as Lily entered. "Come along."

"When are you to be grown up, Lily ?" he asked as they walked together.

"I don't know, I suppose next year."

"Not next spring ?"

"No, I am only sixteen."

"You are more nearly seventeen. I think you ought to come out next season."

"I don't care about it, for Miss Knight would go away then, I suppose."

"And you prefer Miss Knight's society to balls, operas, and flirtations ! You need not tell me that nonsense, Lily."

"It is not nonsense. I am a great deal fonder of Miss Knight than you think."

"I don't think about it at all. Every girl looks forward to being admired, made love to and married, and never thinks the time comes quick enough, and I don't suppose you are different from the rest."

"I don't suppose you know what girls look forward to, so you need not appear so wise. You may have met some silly girls, but that is not a reason that all girls are silly. Now I am quite sure Miss Knight does not care for admiration one bit."

"Well, what does she care for ?"

"Reading and study of all kinds."

"And you think you are going to be exactly like Miss Knight?"

"No, for I am not half so clever, but I do not mean to be quite a stupid fashionable young lady."

"But Miss Knight is different, she is a governess, has to work for her bread, most likely has only the idea of saving money that she may marry some country cousin when she begins to get ancient."

"She said one day that she did not mean to be a governess always."

If Frank had failed in gleaning direct information he was evidently getting it second-hand.

"Apropos de quoi, did she say that?"

"She was regretting that she did not teach better."

"Does she talk about her people?"

"No."

"Why don't you find out all about her? You are no good."

"It would be horribly rude of me to question her. How could you think of such a thing? And what does it signify who she is?"

"Only that she does not look like a governess, and you might naturally be curious about her."

"I am sure she was never brought up to teach, she has such a pleasant way of making one study, as unlike schoolroom drill as possible."

"By Jove, what a sensation she would create if she came out in London!"

"Do you think her so very pretty?"

"Yes, she is a good-looking girl; not my style though."

"Pray, what is your style?"

“I like a fair woman, with plenty of golden hair, dark eyes and eyelashes. You would not be bad-looking if you had dark eyes, but blue eyes always look so good!”

CHAPTER XIX.

“HOW SHALL WE BEGUILE THE LAZY TIME?”

FOR the next few days Frank Grey did not visit the schoolroom. Lily was not so much with Ada either, for her cousins came and other visitors, who were young and attractive to her, and she was often with them. Ada heard their voices through the house, and on wet days there was ceaseless chatter and laughter in the billiard-room. From it all Ada felt completely cut off. Lily often begged her to share their amusement, but she knew if she were with them that they would care nothing for her enjoyment nor she for theirs, and hence the loneliness.

Ada worked hard in her solitude, and every day her mind had fresh joys; for books spoke to her as living souls had never done. She often wondered whether in life these giant minds had been satisfying to the spiritual needs of those who knew them, or whether in their writings there was not something not quite their own, which, in personal intercourse, was wanting to them—some spirit which spoke unconsciously through their best words and left them in common life.

Sometimes her lonely life in the midst of gaiety made Ada sad and nervous. She could not read, she could do nothing but sit and make vain projects, or sit and think over the dreariness of her life. But her position was

her own choice and herein lay the secret of its being bearable. What is thrust on us by circumstances is always hard to accept; what we choose seems ours to deal with and mould at our will. A desire for purpose and earnestness had come to Ada early in life, and she had not cast it away as most men and women do.

In the quiet of the schoolroom, one wet afternoon, Ada was surprised by the sudden appearance of all the visitors headed by Lily. They came in laughing and talking.

"We are come to consult you on a very important subject," said Lily.

"What is it?"

"We want to have theatricals."

"A play, or only charades?"

"Oh! charades are awful things," said Frank, "no one ever guesses the word; no one knows if they are to laugh or not, and the result is a universal giggle at the wrong place."

"Tableux vivants?" suggested one of the Miss Cathcarts in a mild voice.

"Oh! no," said one of Frank's friends who was of the party, "a fellow looks such a tremendous fool doing nothing, standing to be looked at, till the curtain-man thinks that the spectators have had enough of him!"

"In your case, my dear fellow," observed Frank, "there could be no uncertainty in the man's mind, he would only think it a mistake to raise the curtain at all!"

"You have not told me what you want to do," said Ada.

"The fact is, Miss Knight," said Frank, taking the office of spokesman, "we are all bored to death these wet days, and want something to amuse us, and we think of getting up a play."

"Do you?" she answered with interest, "I will help you if I can."

"Have a screaming farce," said the man who objected to tableaux.

Ada made a wry face.

"Quite right," said Frank, interpreting her look, "they are odious, vulgar things, without any real wit."

"Could we not try one of the old comedies?"

"They have so many characters. 'The School for Scandal' is capital, but we could never do it."

"What do you think of the 'Duenna'?"

"Too many songs in it. Who would sing? I, for one, have no more voice than an old crow."

The conversation was entirely between Frank and Ada. The brilliant suggestions of the rest of the party seemed exhausted, and Frank's friend had turned his attention to murmuring short sentences to Miss Cathcart, and trying to look as if he had not done so.

"You are not encouraging, Mr. Grey," Ada said laughing.

"'The Critic?'"

He shook his head.

"'She Stoops to Conquer?'"

"That might do."

"Shall we get it and read it?"

Ada was quite entering into the spirit of the thing.

"Yes, can I find it for you?"

"I think not. I know where it is in the library, I will fetch it in a minute."

She was away two or three minutes and came back with two books.

"I have brought a copy of my own, so more than one can read."

"Miss Knight and I will cast the play," said Frank, handing over one of the books to his friend, and holding the other with Ada.

"And keep the best part for yourself, I suppose!" said Mr. Linton.

"Perhaps so; I have acted, so you may look on me as a professional."

"Mrs. Hardcastle," said Ada, "who will take that?"

"What sort of part is it," asked the youngest Miss Cathcart, turning her eyes reluctantly away from Mr. Linton.

"An old lady who ought to be amusing."

"Then I won't take it, for I could not make myself an old lady, and I could not make myself funny."

"Dear cousin," said Frank, with a comical look at Ada, "you will be old in time and you are funny now; console yourself."

She did not quite see the point of Frank's observation.

"Now seriously, Miss Knight, we shall not ask their opinion; we shall give them parts. Let me see—Lisa Cathcart shall be Mrs. Hardcastle."

"I will write the names opposite the characters as you cast them," said Ada.

"Bella Cathcart shall be Miss Neville."

"Very good."

"Miss Knight, you shall be —"

"Nothing if you please. I shall not act."

"No? You said you would help."

"I did, and so I will in making costumes, in dressing people, hearing their parts, anything in fact but acting."

He looked at her for a moment to try and detect some sign of vacillation in her face, but seeing none, went on—

"Then, Lily, you shall be Miss Hardcastle."

"I have not a notion what she has to do, but I am sure I shall do it badly."

"Never mind, Miss Knight will coach you."

"Then there is the maid," he continued, "any one can do that; she has only a few sentences to say."

"Would you mind taking it if no one else turns up?" he asked Ada.

"You will surely find some girl in the neighbourhood very glad to do it. If not, I'll take it."

"Now for the men. Sir Charles Marlowe, an old gentleman's part?"

"Would papa do?" asked Lisa Cathcart.

"Capital. Mr. Hardcastle, the father? Sir William Fenton will do for that, he is coming next week. Linton shall be Hastings. I shall be young Marlowe, though it is rather trying to make love to one's sister!"

"Change your part with some one," said Lily.

"No, no, never mind, I'll try and think you are some one else; besides the madre will be satisfied with the extreme propriety of your acting with your brother!"

"Who is going to do Tony Lumpkin? Are you forgetting that important personage?" asked Ada.

"No, but to tell you the truth, I am puzzled about him."

"Could Mr. Linton take that?" asked Lily.

"No, leave Linton where he is. I will not have any of the characters changed, it would cause such confusion. I must write to a friend of mine, Tom Chaplin, who has often acted. If he can come, it will be all right; I have seen him as 'Tony.'"

"I have put all the names down, but who is to be stage manager?" said Ada.

"You, of course."

"I can help, of course, but if you want your play to go off really well, you ought to have some one who is accustomed to those things."

"You will do quite well, I should think," said Lily, "you can scold us and tell us our faults."

"You can't imagine the difference it makes having some experienced person; every one feels compelled to obey him, and the whole thing goes more smoothly."

"I think you are right," said Frank. "I'll try and find some one. Perhaps that fellow Chaplin could act and manage us too—we'll see about it. Now suppose one of you write to Lacy for acting editions of the play."

"I will," said Lily.

"They will be here," continued Frank, "the day after to-morrow; then let us have the first rehearsal on Saturday."

"Where is the theatre to be?" Ada inquired.

"In the back hall. The audience can be in the front hall, the curtain can go where the pillars are. Come and see."

They all adjourned to the hall, where they made plans for the foot-lights, the green-room, and stage property. In the midst of it all Lady Grey joined them, and heard what they intended.

"Have they asked you to assist them?" she inquired of Ada.

Her tone was very polite, but Ada knew what was meant by it, and if she had been in any doubt, the expression on Frank's face would have convinced her.

"Yes," she answered.

"You will not act, I suppose?"

"Not if I can avoid it, but I have promised to take a very small part if they fail in getting any one to fill it."

"I can find numbers of girls if they are wanted, and I should not like Lily to take a prominent part."

"I hope you have not arranged to do so, Lily," she said, turning to her daughter.

"I wish you would not meddle, mother," interrupted Frank impatiently. "I will tell you all about the arrangements by-and-by. We are very busy now."

Lady Grey took no notice of what he said, but came near Ada.

"I rely upon you," she said, "not letting Lily get too excited about this acting; she is not strong, and besides that, she should not neglect her studies."

"I do not see the use," she added, "of having a governess for Lily if she never works. I am always very practical and plain-spoken, Miss Knight."

"Yes, I see that," Ada answered quietly, "but as your daughter is almost grown up, I can scarcely order her to do or not do anything, can I?"

"No, but if you do not allow yourself to be led away by these things, if you continue to devote your time to reading and practice, you will influence my daughter. Who," she added with a smile intended to be very kindly, "I can see has formed an attachment to you."

Frank had been measuring the hall, and chattering to the others, but this little private talk of his mother's did not escape his observation, though he could not hear the words.

Sir Trevor appeared now, tempted out of the library by the hum of voices.

"We are going to have a play," said Lily eagerly.

"Going to act! A nice mess you'll make of it. Could you not give me a part?"

"Yes," said Frank, "I'll resign mine to you with

He laughed and shook his head.

"I'll come and flirt with the young ladies in the green-room!"

"You have joined the party, I hope," he said to Ada.

"In a sort of way, yes."

"You must make all the stage property yourselves; that will give you something to do, for you are a dreadfully lazy set."

So saying he turned back to the library, followed by his wife.

Frank came up to Ada.

"What was my mother saying to you?" he asked.

"She was reminding me that I was a governess," she answered on the spur of the moment, but the instant afterwards she was sorry that she had said it, for it was a confession that she had allowed herself to be annoyed by Lady Grey's snubbing, and the acknowledgment to Frank seemed to admit him to her confidence.

He looked angry and interested, it would be difficult to describe his expression.

"What an infernal shame! I can't understand how women can do those things," he said, with a gesture of scorn; "but you won't forsake us? My mother's stupidity will not make any difference?"

Ada laughed. "I am afraid I should only be more inclined to act if Lady Grey told me not to do so, but she did not tell me that; in fact, I forget what she said."

She moved towards Lily, as if she considered the conversation with Frank at an end. He looked a little disappointed for a second, then solaced himself by a flirting badinage with his cousin Lisa. He had his own views with respect to this play, and the part Ada should take in it. He would not have so readily

acquiesced in Lily's doing Miss Hardcastle if he had not calculated on a change of parts being effected at the last, when Lily's inefficiency was proved. He flattered himself he could manage his little sister, as he called her. She could learn her part and be encouraged till the last, and then by a little diplomacy he could make her afraid to undertake it, and she would beg Miss Knight to fill her place. Oh! it would be all right. Already this girl's reserve was broken through, or she would not have been so frank about his mother. She saw that he liked her, and that she could say whatever came into her head to him. It was pleasant to think of establishing a good understanding with such a pretty girl, and such a clever girl too, for Frank Grey, though he had not much depth, was quite quick enough to see that Ada was above the class of women he usually met with.

I'll talk to her about Westbury, thought he, the next time I get an opportunity; should not wonder if she were in love with him. Those quiet, scholarly fellows are awfully knowing; 'pon my soul he has good taste! How common and coarse those Cathcart girls look beside her. No, I should not be at all surprised if she were in love with Westbury. She has that kind of manner which I remark in women that are preoccupied. Girls if they have not a fixed notion in their heads about some man, look brighter when a fellow talks to them, look more interested, and think it worth while making some little exertion to be agreeable. I agree with my mother, there is something rum about the girl.

By that evening's post Frank wrote to his friend Chaplin to ask him to come and stay at Kingscourt, and help them with their theatricals. While writing to him he suddenly recollected a man that would coach them all

splendidly ; a sort of half professional whom Chaplin had introduced to him once. He remembered Chaplin having said that this fellow undertook to manage amateur companies, and that he was quite a man he would like to have in his house. He could not recall his name at first, but after a little puzzling over it, it came into his head. It was Florio. So he begged Chaplin to bring him down with him to Kingscourt.

Frank knew that his mother was always quite willing that he should ask as many of his friends to Kingscourt as he liked, and Sir Trevor agreed that if they were to have theatricals they had better be well got up.

"By the way, mother," Frank said that evening, "do you know that Lily has rather a nice voice?"

He had forgotten all about his promise till now.

"Has she? I don't think so; it is a poor, weak voice."

"It is not very strong, perhaps, but I suppose it is worth cultivating."

"Useless expense," was Lady Grey's laconic reply.

"I don't know, she might as well have some lessons."

"How are they to be got?" asked Sir Trevor who overheard the conversation, "at this distance from town."

"What made me think of it was, that this Signor Florio is an excellent musician, and I think Lily might as well have the benefit of his teaching while he is here. She seems awfully anxious to have lessons."

"Certainly she shall have them if it can be managed."

Lady Grey shrugged her shoulders.

"A silly waste of money I call it," she said.

"Who is this Signor Florio?" asked Sir Trevor.

"He seems to be a jack-of-all-trades."

"He is a man of good family, who is uncommonly hard up. I heard his story from Chaplin, but upon my word

I forget it. His mother was an Italian, and he calls himself by her name. I suspect there is some bar sinister in his birth. He has a considerable theatrical connection and teaches singing. I don't think he has any money but what he earns. How the devil he manages, to live I don't know, but he takes his part in anything that's going on, Chaplin says, and is very free with his money, which is more than can be said for a good many fellows."

"Are you quite sure, Frank," asked Lady Grey, "that he is a man whom I would wish to see in my house? I must say all this theatrical business sounds rather low."

"Set your mind at rest, my dear mother; I think I know a gentleman when I see him."

"But how is one to treat a man like that? It is so awkward. You cannot treat him quite as an equal when you pay him for coming and also for teaching."

Sir Trevor was playing whist, but just at that moment his partner was dealing and his attention was sufficiently free to hear his wife's idiotic remark.

"If you treat every one with equal civility and attention," he said, looking over his shoulder, "you cannot be wrong. It is only intimate and attached friends that have any further claim on you."

He turned to his cards again.

"Your father," said Lady Grey, "has such a stupid way of thinking that the rules that suit him suit everyone."

"He is never far wrong," said Frank, who had a pride in his father.

He liked to think that no one could ever accuse Sir Trevor of an uncourteous or dishonourable word or deed. It did not follow that his own life would be a copy of

his father's; yet, with a much laxer rule of action for himself, Frank admired the simple severity of Sir Trevor.

It never occurred to Ada that, in her life as a governess, she was ever likely to meet any one who knew her as Miss St. George. I do not know why she should not have thought it possible. Perhaps because she had known few people, and those seemed so utterly removed from her life that she thought of them as dead. She drew no picture even of meeting Kingsley; and the feeling she cherished towards him would be difficult to describe. It was no sentimental grieving over him as over a lost love. She never thought of its being impossible that she should love again; it was only when any man tried to make her love him (as in Sydney's case) that she felt he had not the power. Perhaps the day would come when some one would have that power. How could she tell? It must be a nature that would dominate hers, that would carry her mind further on the same track on which it had been travelling, into more developed ideas; or else, if the whole bent of his thought differed from hers, the light of his intellect must be so intense as to show her at once the beauty of his views and the faults of her own.

It had so happened that Ada had never heard Florio's name mentioned before he came to Kingscourt. Lily had heard it, but forgotten it again, and in talking of him to Ada had only called him Signor Something; so she was not at all prepared to see a face that she knew.

Lily was delighted at the prospect of singing lessons, and they arranged that they should be in the forenoon. Ada made a condition that if she helped with the theatricals, the mornings should be given to study; for,

though Lady Grey had spoken without delicacy of feeling, Ada acknowledged that she was right in the main.

Mr. Chaplin and Signor Florio came down on Saturday, and in the afternoon, at the hour fixed, they all came into the schoolroom for the first rehearsal.

Frank introduced Mr. Chaplin to Ada, and she did not notice Florio till Frank said,

"Here, Miss Knight, is our schoolmaster, whom we are all to stand in awe of, Signor Florio."

She looked up with quite a startled expression, which did not escape Frank's observation.

"We have met before, I think," said Florio, coolly extending his hand.

He did not say Miss St. George, so Ada felt relieved. Had he heard the name that Mr. Grey had called her by, and did he understand?

"You are going to help me," he added, "to keep them in order, Miss (Ada looked at him quickly) Knight, are you not?"

"Yes; let us begin," she said, with unusual excitement in her voice.

They all read their parts, looking most silly and standing about in every variety of unmeaning attitude. They went once through it all, and then over the first scene carefully. There never was a more unmanageable troupe; but Signor Florio set to work in a most business-like way.

Miss Neville giggled in a corner with "Hastings," and was never ready to come on at the right time. Lily read her part in a very timid, monotonous tone. Frank made love to her in a lazy, confident way. They were all quite tired before it was over.

"Well; what do you think of us?" asked Chaplin,

when they had gone through the first scene for the second time, and Frank had declared that he would not do any more.

"I am allowed to be frank, am I not?" said Florio.

Chorus of "Oh! yes;" for every one expected to be complimented on having distinguished themselves; and the Miss Cathcarts thought that Signor Florio would probably say that they had such a decided talent for the stage that it was unfortunate they had not to earn their living by it.

"Well, Tony, you are all right, you have done it so often. Sir Charles is much the most easy in manner, and knows what to do with his arms and legs. Some of you seem to find them an incumbrance! Mr. Hardcastle will do, with practice. Miss Neville had better not laugh so much, but study her part. Miss Hardcastle is too timid, I'll give her a private lesson. The rest of the men will do; but you must have a rehearsal every day; and at the third, no hooks, and every one who makes a mistake is to be fined half-a-crown. Oh! I was forgetting the maid," he added, turning to Ada. "Are you going to act the part or is it only as proxy you are taking it?"

"I don't know. I will do it if I am wanted."

"I must drill you a little bit."

"You and I," said Lily, "are the worst. I am so glad you will keep me company."

"How late it is! We must dress for dinner," said one of the Miss Cathcarts,

They liked to devote a considerable time to their personal endowment.

Florio was standing close to Ada.

"You don't look your part," he said in a low tone.

"Do I not? Well, I cannot help it, can I?" she said innocently; for it did not occur to her that this was meant as a compliment, or that there was a *double entente* in the words.

"Why do you choose to act?"

She understood him now, and flushed nervously.

"That may also be a necessity," she said stiffly.

"I will help you as much as I can. Trust me."

Then he moved away and joined the others.

CHAPTER XX.

“ SAE SMOOTH HIS SPEECH.”

ADA always came down early and had an hour's study before breakfast; it seemed to give a basis for the thoughts of the day to rest on, and left the comfortable feeling that, in spite of the many interruptions afterwards, she had gained something.

All culture comes not from books, and in the summer-time life taught Ada much, but in the winter when all nature lay cold and still, she thought it well to shut herself up with the dead and learn all she could from them.

The morning after the rehearsal, Ada had not been in the schoolroom more than a quarter of an hour when a tap came at the window. It gave her a start, and she did not feel kindly towards her visitor—Signor Florio. She opened the window however, she could scarcely do otherwise, and he walked in.

“ Good morning, Miss St. George,” he said. “ Thank you for letting me in, but I had better shut the window or you will be frozen.”

So he closed it and came and sat beside her.

“ You are angry with me for disturbing you ? ”

“ No, you gave me a start, that is all.”

“ I thought it might be as well to see you alone, in case I might unknowingly say something awkward before the others.”

"You are very kind," she said.

Honourable as he might be, she did not like the thought that he knew her secret. It placed him unavoidably in a more familiar relation to her. Annoyance was her instinctive feeling, though her reason checked it, and told her that if Signor Florio was a man of any honour it could not be of any importance his knowing that she had assumed a name as governess; in fact, it ought to be pleasant to her in this world of strangers to see a familiar face, to meet one who had known her in her own home.

"These people do not know your real name?"

"No."

"Excuse my seeming curiosity; they might ask me questions and I should like to know what to say."

He spoke so courteously that she was angry with herself for wishing that he had not come.

"They only know me as Miss Knight," she answered, "and if you do not mind, I would rather that they did not know my real name."

He wanted to know why she concealed her name, but could not ask directly without apparent impertinence.

"Your little secret is very safe with me. What business is it of mine? But if you will excuse my saying so, I do not think it is ever quite wise to assume a name unless there is an absolute necessity."

"But there was," she said quickly, and unsuspectingly; "I do not want my uncle to find me out. I left Oaklands because I could not bear the life there, and I do not wish to be forced to return."

"Oh!" and then Florio was silent.

He was on the point of telling her that her uncle could have no power over her. He thought she was

fully twenty-one, and it seemed absurd to him to find any one so ignorant of the laws as to suppose that at that age she was bound in obedience to him. But as the effect of this ignorance was to make her in some way dependent on him, Florio was unwilling to enlighten her.

Ada had improved much since Florio had seen her, had more dignity of manner, more womanly beauty. He looked at her admiringly. It seemed natural that she, a governess, and he, a teacher, should in this strange house be friends and allies.

"But," he said after that little silence, "your unpleasant position cannot last very long. I think your cousin told me that when you are twenty-four, you will be mistress of your property."

"Yes, it is true."

"Your cousin's death was very sad," he said after a little pause; "I saw the announcement in the 'Times.' Scarcely twenty!"

"By the way, Signor Florio," Ada said, flushing nervously, "I hope you do not mind my not paying that debt of Sydney's at once?"

"I really can't," she added simply, "but I will pay it when I am of age, and perhaps some of it before that."

"I wish you would not speak of it at all, Miss St. George, or rather Miss Knight, for I must get into the habit of calling you so. I wish you would understand that I am not at all in a hurry; that the longer you owe me the better, for it always gives me the hope of hearing of you, and I am not so conceited as to imagine that you would not utterly forget my existence if there were no such link between us."

Very magnanimous of Signor Florio, as he knew he

had not the slenderest legal claim on her for the said money. His words sounded simple enough, and yet Ada felt a repulsion to him when he alluded to anything like a tie between them.

"You were grieved at your cousin's death, I have no doubt. I was a great friend of his. Was he long ill?"

"Not ill enough to be in bed; the end came quite suddenly."

Ada did not like speaking of Sydney. His death was at all times very present to her, and now the whole scene was dreadfully vivid, perhaps because she had not seen Florio since Sydney was alive and well.

Interpreting her feelings from the shortness of her reply, Florio said,

"Perhaps you do not like to talk of him? I think it makes people live again to speak of them to friends. Why should their names never be mentioned, as if you wanted to bury the memory of them in their graves?"

What Florio said was just, but Ada could not believe that he had been quite the friend to Sydney that he pretended to have been, and she wanted to tell him so. It seemed hypocritical of her to accept that profession of a friendship which she did not believe had existed. She might as well say so at once; if she waited and thought over it she could not put it in better chosen words.

"I think," she said, looking at him with sudden resolution in her eyes, "that Sydney's life at Oxford did him harm, and I cannot look on you as quite his friend when you were a help instead of a hindrance to him in that life."

An unpleasant expression came for an instant into Florio's eyes, but he looked down and gave a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"I suppose you allude to my lending him money, and if I had not done so he would have gone elsewhere for it, got into the hands of the Jews and goodness knows what ; but I am glad you said what you thought."

Here he looked up at her. He had eyes that compelled attention.

"You do not understand," he continued, speaking rather stiffly, "what men's lives are, and what is bad and what is good for them ; how far they may be allowed to give way to their inclinations and where it is safe to check them."

Seeing an incredulous look in her face, he added,

"You need not suppose that I am speaking in this vague way to mystify you ; I will tell you the whole of Sydney's Oxford life if you like, but I think you have too much sense to ask it."

She was silenced by his expression, and was not anxious for details.

"The boy was very miserable when he came there ; I saw that. A little excitement did him no harm. He was too weak-minded to overcome a feeling simply by courageous resolution."

Ada was roused into active antagonism to Florio now from his insinuations. What right had he to bring up that old story ?

"You allude to his caring for me, I suppose ?" she said defiantly. "If Sydney made you his confidant, you ought to respect his secret !"

"I am sorry to have pained you, but it was hardly just to accuse me of being a harmful influence in his life. I will accept the imputation, however, rather than cause you sorrow."

All his speeches were most polite, but he saw that she

did not like them. He had seen enough of the world, this Signor Florio, to read the human face with tolerable accuracy. His perception was like an eye accustomed to the dark, and he was not likely to make a false step.

"What a detestable woman that Lady Grey is," he said suddenly, "she is vulgarity through and through, steeped in it from head to foot. It is amusing to see the way she tries to ignore me because I am a singing master. She has to tolerate me at her table, she cannot thrust me out of sight as she does you, so she bows to me with a scornful uplifting of the nose, and if I make a remark to her she pretends not to hear it."

Ada laughed, and now that the conversation was no longer about herself, she grew more amiable.

"I don't like her," she said, "but I keep away from her, and am very glad to be 'thrust out of sight.'"

"It is not the less odious of her. She is not by birth or education, a lady. She was raised by marriage to a position above that she was born to, so is fearfully suspicious of any one claiming equality with her. Accidental place in society is the only way a vulgar narrow mind has of judging of people."

"She seems too contemptible to talk about. I like her husband. How can he tolerate her?"

"Oh! men are so '*soft*.' I suppose he fell in love with her when she was a very young and pretty girl, and never thought she would develope into anything so sickening!"

"But if she was in love with him; I should have fancied that marrying so young she would have adapted herself to his views and have grown out of her native prejudices. Women are quick at that."

"But then she was probably not in love with him;

only dazzled by the prospect of being My Lady, and her sweetness which was pretty in their courtship was soon given up afterwards. Besides this, race will tell."

"Her son and daughter are not like her."

Ada was drawn on to talk and hear Florio's opinion."

"I am not so sure of that; but you like Miss Grey?"

He had already observed this.

"Yes, she is an affectionate, nice girl."

He did not answer, but there was something in his face which did not agree with her.

"And Mr. Grey?" she said, laughing, "what do you think of him?"

"I do not like him."

"Why?"

"He is a conceited ass."

"I like him."

"So I perceived."

"How did I manifest my feelings?" she asked in a jesting way; but truly she was annoyed at Florio's fancied quickness of perception.

"I don't know. You were at ease with him; he has a genial manner; it is natural you should like him."

"He is bright and seems kind, that is all I find to like in him."

"What a dreary life you must have here," Florio said presently.

"No. I have a great deal of time to myself, I can always find something to do."

"You are fond of reading," he said, glancing at her open book. "I cannot say *I* am now. I have learnt all I can from books; life teaches me—has taught me many a hard lesson. I can't bear reading now, it unfits one for coping with men. No contemplation and abstraction

for me ; much knowledge of the world and keen wide-awakenedness, that is the only thing for me."

Florio interested Ada at this moment. She had a strange sort of feeling towards him.

"But you lose much by that practical hardness."

"Perhaps—but I cannot help it. My hand is against every man, and every man's hand against me."

He pushed his hair off his brow wearily. What did it matter what he said to this girl? He need not be guarded ; she would not talk of him ; he knew whom he had to deal with.

"A singing master's life," he added in a more cheerful voice, "is a very hard, practical one. Who cares for you? They only get what they can out of you, and snub you for your pains!"

"Not people of any refinement of mind and of sentiment."

"Bah—this refinement of mind and sentiment that you talk about, what is it? It makes a pleasant drawing-room companion. It is comfortable for those that have it, for it hedges them round and makes their lives gentle and cultivated, but I have known men of sentiment and refinement do a more dastardly act than the most uncultured, and justify it by the sense of right that their education has given them!"

He spoke as if in remembrance of some past scene in his life, or the life of some one he loved, and Ada felt sorry for him and a little bit more interested.

"I am to teach Miss Grey singing, am I not?" Florio asked, apparently shaking off his unpleasant recollections.

"Yes, I believe so."

"What kind of voice has she?"

"A bird-like soprano."

"Has she a good ear?"

"Yes, very good."

"Come, that looks hopeful, but what good will a fortnight's lessons do her?"

"It will give her an idea how to practise, and I can see that she carries out your directions."

"And your own voice? Have you exercised it much?"

"No. I have scarcely sung since you saw me."

"So much the better, you would only have got into bad habits alone."

"But I consider," he added, "that it is positive stupidity to waste such a voice as yours."

"What can I do?" she answered, smiling.

"Get lessons—go to Paris and study. Why, you could do anything with your voice!"

She flushed with pleasure, but instantly her countenance fell.

"How can I do all that without money? I can do all that when I am twenty-four, but there are more than three years to wait."

"Yes, and when you are twenty-four, you will not feel inclined to do it. You will have wealth, you will have other interests; and if you learn, will only half do it, and be merely a rather good amateur."

"What else would you expect me to be?"

"A professional. Choose a singer's career. I am sure it is better than a governess' drudgery or the idleness of a life like Lady Grey's."

She shook her head, smiling.

"No. I should not like the life, and I am too old to begin."

"You would be if you had not such an extraordinary talent; and as to the life, why should you dislike it?"

"One would have to associate with all sorts of people."

"Not," she added hastily, "that I think myself a bit better than they are, but their ways would not be the same as mine, and I should be hated, or else lose my individuality—sacrifice my prejudices for theirs."

"How little people know of a phase of life to which they have not been accustomed! Have you not to associate now with people you do not like? What is Lady Grey? I am sure she is more vulgar minded than any one I have ever met in the dramatic world!"

"Yes, but there are different kinds of vulgarity, and that which takes the form of familiarity is much the most odious."

"You might meet with much of that if you had to work up from the lowest step in mere acting, but in the Italian Opera it would be quite different. You will meet with as thorough ladies and gentlemen amongst Italian singers, as anywhere in the world. They may not look into each other's pedigrees, but it depends on your own manners what set you get into. Besides this, you are not timid or silly, and would not be easily swayed by the people you would meet."

"Still I am not likely to take to the stage."

"No, I suppose not. I will give you lessons when Miss Grey is learning, if you do not object."

"Thank you, but is it worth while?"

She felt awkward about the acceptance of his kindness, and had rather he had not offered this.

"Yes, it is a pleasure to hear a voice like yours."

"But it will take up your time."

"Pooh—what have I to do here? You can be of

more use to Miss Grey by singing with her, and hearing her faults."

She could not say anything against this last argument.

"What do you think of these theatricals?" she asked.

"The play is a good one, but requires a great deal of good acting, and at present some of the actors are wretched, and I fear will not improve much."

"Myself for one?"

"There is nothing to find fault with in your acting, but you do not look your part. You are taller than the others, have a more dignified air, and altogether look absurd as the maid. Could it not be altered?"

"No, I do not want to take a more prominent part."

"Is it that *you* do not wish it, or Lady Grey does not wish it?"

"Both."

"I thought so," he said laughing, "I would take it to spite her."

Here the breakfast-bell rang, and Ada gave a start; she had not thought it was so late. They both rose.

"I suppose," said Florio carelessly, "her ladyship would not approve of my spending the morning here with you?"

"Certainly she would not."

"But after all we are both teachers, and if we are not fit for her aristocratic company, we may solace ourselves with our own society."

They left the school-room as they spoke, and met in the passage, Frank, who, by some extraordinary accident, was down in time.

"Hullo!" he said, when he saw them. "How early you two are! Been having a private lesson, Miss

Knight?" And he gave a quick meaning look from one to the other.

"No, we were talking over old times," Florio said with great sang froid. "Miss Knight and I are old friends."

These three walked into breakfast with widely different thoughts of each other—thoughts which they would have been very unwilling to communicate. There was a little scornful smile on Florio's lips; hidden somewhat by his thick moustache. He had noticed Frank's observation of them—few things escaped him—and he was purposely boastful of his intimacy with Ada. Not that he cared much for it; he was a man that rejoiced but little in small triumphs—having much confidence in his power—and was indifferent to most people unless they influenced the whole bent of his own life.

"Oh!" thought Frank, "that girl's stiffness is only affectation. How friendly and familiar she seems with this Florio—a sort of adventurer. I shall soon find out all about her."

When he saw Florio's evident admiration of her and his deferential manner to her, Frank was piqued and curious.

Somehow at breakfast, Ada found herself more than usually drawn into conversation, and wondered at it. She looked at Signor Florio and noticed his keen eyes, his anxious haggard expression, changing sometimes into satirical indifference, and remarked how, when he talked, the others seemed compelled to listen to him. He was a man of infinitely more talent and culture than any one at the table; yet how was it that she felt more comfortable talking to Sir Trevor or Frank? How was it she felt a desire to contradict Florio and make him angry, while

a strong power seemed to restrain her? Sometimes, Florio's speech was like a north-east wind, which bites and withers as it passes, making the world ugly.

Signor Florio's conversation with Ada, about her being a singer, was very much in her mind that morning, underlying all her words and occupations. It seemed a finer thing to cultivate some talent and make herself a name and an independence by it, than to take to an aimless occupation to shut out thought, or live lazily on wealth that came by no labour of her own. An artistic life would have great attractions for a woman of her thoughts and tendencies; and that it should be looked upon as possible by a disinterested outsider caused a revolution in her feelings with respect to it; greater than she herself dreamed of.

It is incalculable our influence on each other, and the wide vision that a few careless words give! Certainly there are some creatures, so trained and pruned that there can be no new and unexpected growth, but thank God all are not so; and surrounded as we are by unmeaning customs and conventionalities, in thought at least we spring beyond our limited life, into boundless possibilities.

Florio knew that what he had said would linger in Ada's mind. He knew that her southern nature required a life of more excitement and activity than teaching would give her, and the fact of her having left her home to be a governess, showed that she only wanted to have the fascination of a singer's life pointed out to her, to plunge into it with readiness. It did not much signify to him whether Ada followed out his suggestion or not, but it was not unpleasant to think that he might guide her life, and that she might owe her after distinction to him.

At the rehearsal that afternoon, Florio remarked Miss St. George's easy, graceful movements and simple way of speaking, which showed him that her intelligence would work without the obstruction of personal vanity. He felt a desire to gain power over her mind, and a desire with a man such as Florio was seldom a latent and useless thing.

What if her interests became involved in his? If that could be possible, his position might be very considerably strengthened. That one person's rise or fall should involve that of another is a partial guarantee of the security of both.

Are we sent into the world with a fatal adaptation to certain characters we meet with, and can no guardedness exclude them from our lives? We feel in early acquaintance how antagonistic they are in the main; then the point of attraction develops itself, and our eye rests on it till we see nothing else. It requires some horrible awakening to go back to our first impression.

Every one, in truth, that we meet, even the dullest, is invested with a certain interest, greater than we feel in inanimate nature or art, and this interest is intense according to the breadth and depth of thought that life has given to each soul.

The history of empires and nations seems rough and unfinished, compared to the mental and external life of one vigorous intellect.

CHAPTER XXI.

HIS OWN OPINION WAS HIS LAW."

THE next morning Ada came down to the schoolroom without the comfortable feeling of having the morning-hours quite to herself. There was no reason why she should suppose that because Signor Florio had come once, that he was likely to disturb her a second day, and yet she sat down to read without any sensation of privacy. She read in a vague way, not fully taking in the meaning of the words, and wondered why this writer whom she had always considered clear and vigorous should not rivet her attention as usual.

It was a miserably chilly morning. A cold north wind had succeeded to a night of frost.

It will be scarcely a tempting morning, thought Ada, for Signor Florio to take a walk, so I need not fear his appearing at the window in that ghostly way that he did yesterday; but she looked up from her book often, with a sense of restlessness that she could not account for.

The door opened behind her. She turned quickly and saw Florio. Was she growing silly and nervous? His coming in a different way from that in which she looked for him, gave her a curious sense of his being everywhere—a superstitious fancy that his was a presence not to be escaped from.

"I cannot stay in bed in the morning," he said, coming forward and shaking hands with her, "and do not

know where to go to. Will you excuse my disturbing you?"

"Certainly," she said in a not very cordial voice.

"It is so cold too, and this is the only room with a fire at this hour. Will you go on with your reading just as if I were not here, please."

He drew a chair to the fire as he spoke, and sitting down, rested his head on his hand, and looked away from her.

Ada continued reading, but she could not help glancing up at Florio now and then, but he never looked round, he was evidently not thinking of her. Suddenly he turned to Ada, and his face was quite colourless.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" he said abruptly.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Is this house haunted? I spent such an infernal night, I feel an old man this morning!"

He spoke with such energy that the words he used did not seem too strong.

"I never heard that it was thought to be haunted, but," she added with quick sympathy, "you are ill perhaps. Dreams are terrible sometimes."

"Have you ever felt their power?" he asked with a sudden kindling of light in his eyes which seemed to make his face paler. "Have they ever attended you all day, and made you a greater slave to their terrors than you have ever been to any living danger?"

"Yes, I understand, I often think they warn us."

Down went her book and she turned her face towards him, and even drew her chair slightly in his direction.

"Bah!" he said, with a sudden change of manner which was apparently an effort. "I should never have thought that you were superstitious. What can dreams

mean? They are only the vagaries of the mind when you can no longer control it. If you sit lazily musing in your waking hours, and do not try to give any particular bent to your thoughts, they will run riot and be guilty of such tricks that we need not be surprised at what they do while we sleep."

"I do not assert that dreams predict events, but they may. What do we know about it? What do we know about anything? We do not understand why we grow old and die; why we suffer; why we are such a mixture of good and evil; where our spirits go;—anything in fact. Why should we sneer at supersitition?"

He laughed mockingly.

"If we let ourselves believe in possibilities like that, our life would be most visionary and uncomfortable." Here he gave a little shudder.

"No, no, see things as they are and have courage; justice will be done at last."

He was silent, and Ada was wondering what he could mean.

"You think me a little mad, I fancy?" he said more cheerfully, "I have been talking to my own thoughts. Come and practice."

And he walked to the piano.

"Oh, no, it would disturb the house. I am sure Lady Grey would think it very impertinent of me to sing."

"And still more impertinent to have a much finer voice than her daughter!"

"Don't you like Lily's voice?"

"It is pretty, but she will never sing with passion; she will never conquer people with her voice as you will."

She hated his praise and yet it was impossible to check it. To-day she could not accept it silently.

"I suppose it would not be true," she said with warmth, "to say I don't care to conquer people, but I certainly do not like being told that I can do so."

He looked at her steadily under his lowered eyelids. "You do not know me well," he said calmly, "or you would be content with my praise. You are ignorant of what you can do, so I tell you. Have you thought of what I said yesterday?"

"Yes," she said in a careless tone.

"You are not so indifferent about it as you pretend to be. You ought to despise affectation."

She flushed deeply, but that was the only evidence that she heard his speech.

"There are so many reasons for my not going on the stage," she said, "that there is no use thinking about it"

"Besides the reason you gave yesterday, there is some stronger one? Perhaps some one you love would disapprove of it?"

He looked at her in a searching way that Ada felt to be an impertinence.

"Perhaps so," she said quietly, returning his look without flinching.

"Why is it," he asked impatiently, "that you will not consider me your friend?"

"Why should you expect it? I have known you a very little while. I don't make friends quickly."

"No, that is not it. You dislike me."

He got up from his chair by the fire, and stood close to her.

"Unjustly," he continued, "for you know nothing of me. I have felt as though I could be your friend. It is better to choose me for a friend than an enemy."

I can be as thoroughly the latter as the former. No half measures."

"Am I obliged to choose which you shall be?" she asked with a nervous laugh.

"Not now, in words, but of course practically, in acts."

"I am very indifferent about people," she said carelessly, "perhaps because I have had so few friends."

"This Mr. Westbury?" he asked, "Is he not a friend of yours?"

Not to answer him, would be to give an undue importance to her friendship for Mr. Westbury. To answer would be to acquiesce in being questioned. What was she to do?

"Yes," she said after a moment's pause. "Mr. Westbury was master at the school I was educated at in Belgium. I tell you because it is quite unimportant whether you know or not, but I dislike being questioned."

"I know so much of your life, I fancied you would not mind my knowing such a trifling thing. Excuse my impertinence. Let us go back to our former discussion. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that some one you care for would not like you to go on the stage—"

He kept his eyes very steadily fixed on her face, so that not the slightest change of expression could escape him; he rather overdid his watchfulness, for his close observation made her feel and look uncomfortable, independently of the subject of conversation.

"Well," she interrupted, "supposing that were the case, would it not be a quite sufficient reason for not going on the stage?"

"I tell you that this imaginary person, whoever he

may be, would before long applaud you more than any one. If you fail you are sure to be blamed, but if you succeed—which you will do—your success will silence all criticism. We greatly over-estimate the opposition and condemnation of others. If you have only enough force of character you may do anything you like, and compel others to see that you are right.”

“Not unless first of all, you feel it to be right for yourself.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Everything that is implanted in your nature is right.”

“That is a strange assertion,” she said, laughing. “Suppose it was in my nature to kill some one, would it be right?”

His face changed, and he moved away and stood with his back to the window.

“It might be,” he said, with a hard clearness in his voice “it might be a swift justice, wrenched from you against your will; scarcely your act, but simply the development of just wrath, forgetful that human laws make such sudden punishment a crime, and legal condemnation and death, a just deed!”

His words seemed to have a cruel strength, and Ada as she listened felt as though she must combat his reasoning, for its application might be terrible.

“Retribution by the offended person always has something of personal revenge in it, and therefore loses the elements of justice.”

“Shakespeare talks of ‘the law’s delay.’ It does not work any faster since his time. I believe in taking things into my own hands. I have always done it, and will, to the end.”

He spoke with less excitement, but determinedly.

"I thought," he added, "that you had more individuality, or whatever you like to call it, than to accept the rules of society as the best rules! Wait till you do something which society condemns,—which looks like a crime when it is not, and see whether you will be satisfied to consider yourself base, and to deem arbitrary laws supremely good?"

"You have a way of arguing, by which every fresh sentence is a step out of the direct line of argument, till you end by driving me into a position I never assumed. I never said anything about accepting the rules of society."

Florio smiled.

"Perhaps not, but when I begin to discuss anything with warmth, I forget that I am speaking to an individual with distinct, personal views, and I begin to inveigh against what I think are the views of people in general. Now I will go back to what I was saying about your singing—your nature is artistic. If you act against it, if you do nothing with it, it is so much useless force. It is like a stream flowing by a mill and not turning it.

"That is rather a limping comparison, but never mind," he added, laughing.

"I dare say you are right, but you have not shaken my prejudices against the stage."

"You will think of what I say! Meantime, you will not object to cultivating your voice as much as possible?"

"I cannot here."

"Yes, you can; practise in your leisure hours, and do not bother your head about what is said."

"And if they dismiss me for making too much noise?" Ada said, laughing.

"You'll get another place, or else you'll come to London and study thoroughly for the stage. I can help you. I can lend you money to go on with."

Ada flushed angrily.

"You mean to be kind, Signor Florio, but you are not quick if you have not perceived that I would never incur an obligation to any one or be dependent on any one."

"We are all dependent on one another more or less, and all incur obligations, only some are so blinded by their own pride, they cannot perceive it," he answered coolly.

Florio felt the opposition in Ada's character to his own, and was beginning to desire to conquer her; to awake her interest, and to make her an obedient ally seemed possible.

"What is the good," he said, taking a chair near her, "of standing aloof from every one? It is not amusing to be always alone in thought; never to speak of one's own ambitions and hopes; never to help another or be helped. I know what it is."

There was a watchful look in his eyes all the time he spoke, as if he were recording the effect of his words.

"I have been alone all my life," he continued, "terribly alone sometimes; have been betrayed by my dearest friends; have never done a deed of common kindness that it has not been attributed to some mean motive."

Here he looked very hard at Ada, and she could not help feeling guilty with respect to her opinion of him in Sydney's case, and now in her own. It seemed ungenerous to have suspected him.

"Is there anything in my face that gives the lie to my words?"

He paused for a second as if expecting an answer.

"I have seen that sometimes myself," he went on ;
"men, whose words I have listened to, but whose faces I
have believed in contradiction of their words.

"But," he added with a smile, "I have nothing
specially repulsive in my countenance, have I?"

Ada was looking at him fully as he spoke.

"No," she answered.

Truly he was rather a handsome man, with power in
his face. His repellent expression was like the wave
of shade which passes over the earth on a windy day,
when the clouds are travelling swiftly and giving place
to the sun ; it came and went as quickly.

"Try not to judge hastily," he added, bending towards
her. "Our lives have been curiously connected some-
how, let us try and think well of each other. I don't
see why we should not."

There was a pathetic ring in his voice, which touched
her.

"Nor I either," she answered, smiling.

"Then remember that I am always at your service ;
you have only to command me."

He stooped and touched her hand with his lips.

She was annoyed and perhaps showed it, for he said
at once,

"Surely you are not so English as to object to a
form of courtesy common in our land?"

She did not answer.

"My first act of friendliness to you, now that we are
allies (he assumed a treaty which had been all on his
side), is to warn you that Frank Grey is falling in love
with you!"

Ada looked surprised and blushed.

"You are quite mistaken."

Her first impulse was of course an indignant denial. What girl would accept such a statement placidly? Besides what business was it of Signor Florio's? His friendliness looked very like impertinent interference.

"You will perceive it by-and-by. I only tell you because if he worries you, you have only to tell me, and I shall help you out of your dilemma."

Ada laughed rather scornfully.

"Are you omnipotent in such matters, Signor Florio?"

"No," he answered quietly, "but the advice of a man is always useful to a girl in such cases."

"You may not be here when I make this wonderful discovery!"

"I can always hear about you. You can write to me, can you not?"

"Of course I can, but I do not like trouble."

"Besides," she added, annoyed at his persistence, "if what you think were the case, I should not dream of consulting any one on the subject."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he said carelessly.

No more was said, for the breakfast bell rang. As they left the schoolroom they met Frank, and as the result of their conversation, Ada felt awkward and thought Frank watched her curiously. She was very silent throughout breakfast and was glad when it was over. She felt worried. That restless sensation arising from the going wrong of trifles made everything unpleasant.

After breakfast Frank said to Florio, "Come and have a turn, Florio, and smoke a cigar."

They took their hats from the hall and went out.

"By Jove! isn't it cold?" said Frank, buttoning up his coat. "Let's walk to the farm and see the governor's cattle, perhaps the exercise may warm a fellow."

"All right."

Having paused at an angle of the house to light their cigars, they started.

"What do you think of our play?" asked Frank, thrusting his hands into his pockets and striding along. "Is it hopeful?"

"Yes, I think it will do pretty well. Miss Neville is a donkey, but it doesn't matter. Miss Knight is not suited to her part."

"What do you mean?"

The conversation had just taken the turn that Frank desired.

"Simply that she does not look the servant. She is tall, too graceful, too refined-looking altogether. Of course she can get herself up, can colour a great deal, but she cannot make herself shorter, and it is not a suitable part for her."

"That is true," said Frank, "I consider her a very handsome girl."

This, with an air of having said something which ought to be a comfort to Miss Knight for the rest of her life!

"You have known her a long time, Florio?" he added carelessly.

"Yes; since she was a child."

"I should think some unfortunate circumstances must have made her take to governessing. It is not much in her line, I fancy."

"Needs must when the devil drives! Miss Knight's father, who was an officer, died and left her without a fraction. Men in the service do not make a fortune as a rule."

"But Miss Knight is so deuced good-looking that I wonder she has not been picked up by some fellow."

"Perhaps she did not wish to be 'picked up;' it is just possible."

"Oh! my dear fellow, girls are always ready enough to marry if they get the chance. The advantages of having a home of their own, instead of knocking about the world, are so obvious that they are not such fools as to refuse an offer,"

"You are right as a rule, but Miss Knight is a strange girl. I know her a long time. Very few men would understand her."

"I do not want our play spoiled. Cannot you manage to give Miss Knight another part?"

"She won't spoil it; her part is too trifling. She will only make the other women look insignificant."

"But that is very bad. Why not utilise her appearance?"

"I understand that Miss Knight did not wish to act at all."

"So she said at first; but as she has consented to take a small part, she could easily be persuaded to change."

"What do you propose her doing? The other parts are filled up."

Florio looked at him from under his brows with that peculiar expression that concentrated attention always gave him.

"My sister will never be able to do her part; why should they not change?"

Here Frank flicked the grass with his walking-stick and tried to look indifferent, as if this were a sudden thought that occurred to him.

"You want to act with her?"

"Well, it is more amusing than acting with one's own sister."

Florio was silent for a moment. Here was a good opportunity for showing Ada that he was right about Frank Grey, and that his advice was not to be despised. A very little encouragement, and this confident young man would be quite ready to assume that Miss St. George was in love with him, and it would be exceedingly awkward and unpleasant for her. She would then not be so indignant at his—Florio's—interference, but be rather glad to feel that she had a friend.

"Would your sister be willing to resign her part?" he asked, after that pause.

"Oh! yes. I would explain it to her. She is a timid girl, and has already confided to me that she has undertaken too much."

"Miss Knight will object."

"Let everything remain as it is to the last, then Miss Knight will consent rather than spoil our play."

"You have arranged it very cleverly," Florio said with a side-long glance at him.

"What will Lady Grey say about it?" he added.

"Oh! bother my mother! She will have to shut up."

"How do you expect Miss Knight to learn her new part all in a moment?"

"By Jove! I never thought of that. Don't you think she can?"

"I dare say. She must have one rehearsal. Your sister must resign the day before the play."

"All right. I'll manage it."

Florio smiled slightly at Frank's tone of exultation. The young fool would get a lesson from Miss St. George, if he were not much mistaken. Of course, Lady Grey would see what was going on and would visit it on Miss St. George, for it was in the nature of such a woman to think

everything that a governess did was impertinent. It would be great insolence to receive the addresses of her son, and almost as great to think herself entitled to snub him. Altogether it was likely to be rather hot for Miss St. George. Perhaps she would not be so lofty when she got into a scrape, and had no one to speak for her.

Florio wished to see if Ada was capable of acting, and though this was not a very good part to try her in, still it might give him an idea what she could do. If she were carried away by the excitement and acted it well, in spite of everything, she had talent.

From the first time that Florio had seen Ada and had heard her sing, he thought she had power which only required to be developed. It had never occurred to him that there was any likelihood of such development taking place, and he had dismissed the thought with a regret that her talents should be wasted in private life, but now it was different. There seemed clearly a fate about the whole thing. The way in which he had met her, the unsuitableness of her governess-life, the necessity to her nature of some employment; Miss St. George was thinking a great deal about it. He saw this, though she would not acknowledge it to him. Nature leads men and women in a certain path finally, no matter how they may take to by-roads and keep away from it. Miss St. George would see in time that he was right, and would consent to be guided by him. His mind must dominate hers. He would be associated in her triumphs, and his life somehow involved with hers. Not that he was by any means in love with her. He almost laughed at the thought. Woman's love was too utterly despicable a thing to strive for or even to waste a thought on.

He did not consider himself incapable of winning love. Though no longer a very young man, he was one who felt all things within his power if he attempted them ; but few things seemed worthy his attention, and least of all the love of a woman. In the dark past it had been clouded over, if it had ever lived. The fever fit had passed in the season of youth ; he stepped now into a cold, cruel world, where there was no chance of such attacks, and where all he needed was as keen a wit as the wind of enmity and slander which blew freely around him.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BE WELL ADVISED."

EVERYTHING worked as it was intended, and secretly these two men smiled at the success of their plans. Though the building up of the one plan involved the destruction of the other.

It is so pleasant to see machinery, set in work by one's own hand, accomplishing its object.

The second and third rehearsals went on with much laughter and some improvement. Ada was interested in it all. Even her little part associated her with the others, and in the passing jests she had a part. Her suggestions were always listened to. This for two reasons; they were good, and when they were likely to be overlooked, Florio gave them prominence and compelled the attention of the others. Ada was extremely useful about the costumes, for which reason the women of the party were willing to be gracious to her, and Lily was proud of her friend and was sure that every one admired and liked her. So things went pleasantly that week, and Ada caught up some of the gaiety, the rightful heritage of her years, which had been blown away from her by the harsh wind of coldness and suspicion. She did not come down to the schoolroom before breakfast now, for she objected to those morning interviews with Florio. She was curious to know if he visited the *schoolroom* at that hour and what he thought of her

non-appearance, but he said nothing till one day near the end of the week when he was talking to her about the progress of the costumes.

"I suppose," he said "you have worked at them in the schoolroom in the mornings?"

"No," she answered "I have been lazy lately and have not been down so early."

She was provoked that she had needlessly shut herself up in her room, as Florio had evidently not attempted to disturb her all this time. She determined to be at her old post at the usual hour next morning.

At the rehearsals Ada laughed and talked with Frank, more than she would otherwise have done, to convince Florio that she did not value his warning, and knew that there was no danger.

Frank drew conclusions therefrom, satisfying to his own vanity. These were arrived at the more easily by the help of hints from Florio who, having determined that he should be proved right, was careless as to the means he employed.

All this week was a time of considerable excitement to Ada, for not only were the rehearsals going on, but also Florio's singing lessons. All Florio's words respecting Ada's vocal and dramatic power, were, as he well knew, much thought of.

The consciousness of talent began to grow and grow in Ada's mind. She practised when every one was out, and reaped as much benefit as possible from his teaching; and he knew by the daily gain in mellowness and flexibility that she was studying, and smiled at her foolishness in thinking she could hide it from him.

To feel that she had any one talent which would elevate her life somewhat, aroused in Ada a thousand desires.

Was it possible that in an artistic life, she could work out her ideal—breathe a purer air—give voice to thought—rouse people to nobler aims, to scorn of baseness and a struggle for something better? It was not despicable. It might be a finer thing to write, and leave all that life had taught, a record to coming ages, but how few had genius—how few had the persistency to write truly and simply as things really were, and not bury a few truths in volumes of rubbish and worthless jargon! What though her power was transitory and must perish with her? If through her came to the multitude gleams and glimpses of the spiritual and real, which spoke to the soul and not the animal; which made men feel, even for an instant, the existence of noble emotion, buried in every-day life in the dust of business—would her talent be useless? All these thoughts, and many more, flooded her mind. There came moments of exaltation when she felt she *must* choose the life that Florio had suggested to her; when it did not seem really a matter of choice but necessity. With all Ada's acts, there was blent a thought of Kingsley's approbation or blame. With the exception of her own judgment, there was none other she could appeal to, and certainly Kingsley's had but an imaginary existence. He would decidedly blame her. That public life in the full glare of observation and criticism, seemed one in direct opposition to his tastes. Strange that from the time Ada parted with Kingsley till this moment, the idea of accidentally meeting him never occurred to her. Now it flashed across her as a possibility, nay as a certainty, that in her life as a singer, if she attained any fame, he would hear her and see her, and would naturally seek a renewal of their old friend-

ship. But if he had been severe and suspicious about the frivolous flirtations of a fashionable life, when she was almost a child, would he believe it possible for her to be simple and true amidst the temptations of a stage career? She felt sure that her association with all that tinsel, glitter and empty show, would sicken him and he would think her unworthy of his friendship. Yet if surrounded with admiration and flattery, and filled with bewildering sensations of success, she proved herself (and made him believe her) unchanged in nature—simply struggling for a high, pure life in herself and for the awakening of some noble thoughts in others—unforgettable of the man who had first roused her to thought—surely that would be a triumph!

Ada had a long conversation with Florio one forenoon, when Lily was obliged to go out and could not take her lesson.

Ada begged Signor Florio to join the driving party, and not mind the lesson that day. Carelessly he had half acquiesced, and she fancied he had gone, but at the usual hour he came to the schoolroom, sat down to the piano, and called to her to come as if there had been no question as to his not teaching her as usual.

Knowing that no one would overhear her, Ada sang well, correcting all the faults she had been told of.

"You are in splendid voice to-day," Florio said, pausing to let her rest, "you have been studying a great deal since you began."

"Yes."

"You begin to feel the truth of what I said—that such a glorious organ is worth something?"

"I want to learn," she said truthfully.

"Ah! you are awaking to your power, you begin to believe in yourself."

"I tell you," he said, turning round on the music stool so as to face her, "half the great singers have begun with infinitely inferior voices to yours! You don't know all the obstacles that are removed from your path, by having such a mellow, flexible voice, and such an accurate ear to work upon.

"But," he added, with a shrug of his shoulders, "you are not a musician, I mean that you know nothing of the science of music. You have natural genius, but science should fortify it."

"How am I to learn here?"

"You can learn by yourself. It will be up-hill work, but you can do a great deal if you are resolved. It wants strength of will for most things. I shall write down some works you had better have; get them as soon as you can."

He took out his pocket book, and jotted down some names.

"It is indispensable," he said, as he tore out the page and handed it to her, "that you should study for a year or two under the best masters in London, or Paris."

"I have not chosen music as my profession yet," said Ada seeing how far she had been led in her earnestness.

"No, but you think it possible now; by-and-by, you will think it probable; later on, a certainty.

"Bah!" he added impatiently, "what is the good of living if you are not something or somebody? To bundle through life, grow old and withered; to be swept up with the other rubbish, and make way for newcomers! Do you like it?"

"No," she said, led on unconsciously to talk of herself. "I am not quite so inane, but I am not sure that I know yet what I want, what will satisfy me, what in fact I can *do my best at*."

"Try something then till you do find out ; but it seems to me that when you are gifted with a glorious voice, and ear and feeling to make it valuable, your career ought to be where your gifts lead you. Great versatility of genius is rare. It always seems idiotic to imagine that some startling talent is going to develop itself in a hitherto unknown direction. It reminds me of a fellow I knew, who was a tolerable draughtsman, in fact the little talent he possessed was all in that line ; but he used to sit howling at the piano, and say that he had mistaken his vocation, his soul was the soul of a musician."

Florio laughed, a short scornful laugh, not pleasant to hear ; truly it was not laughter, he was a stranger to that.

"An actor's life seems unreal in this way," said Ada, "he is never quite himself, he is always assuming a character."

"Not at all. You are capable of love, of passion, of indignation at baseness ? Well, you simply express that instead of smothering it all, as we do in real life, and wearing a false face. I think one is a thousand times more true on the stage than off it !

"Here in the world," he went on with energy, "to suit the prejudices, the false virtue of others, we smooth things over and appear what we are not. There, on the stage, you must be true or your acting has no effect ; no counterfeit emotion will go down. If you take the part of a hypocrite, it is to show the audience how man 'can smile and smile and be a villain ;' not to pass yourself off as anything else."

Ada was thinking a great deal of what he had said, and did not speak. It was all true and practical but

lacked a deeper inspiration, did not touch on the point which had all the attraction for her.

"I cannot study in Paris or London now," she said presently, "and when I am able to do so, I shall be too old to begin, I fancy."

"Yes, there is no time to be lost.

"You see," he added, "my suggestion the other day offended you ; I shan't repeat it."

Ada blushed.

"Thank you. I could not think of that. I am sufficiently in your debt already. I might go to London in a year and have lessons for a time, but I doubt if that would be of much use."

"Yes, it would. You have not the difficulties to struggle with that others have. Your Italian pronunciation and your articulation in singing are excellent for an amateur. You might—"

Here he paused. He was thinking that with her prospects, Ada could easily raise money which would enable her to do as she wished, but that knowledge, if she availed herself of it, would make her quite independent of him. She would probably discharge her debt to him, and all connection between them would be at an end. This did not by any means suit Signor Florio. He preferred that Miss St. George should remain ignorant of business matters. Doubtless he partook of the general opinion of men—that a knowledge of the world lessens the attractiveness of women !

"I might—what ?" she asked rather impatiently, seeing him hesitate.

"I don't know, I'll think about it. Meantime, master the science ; study steadily. Who can tell what may happen ? With your voice you could get a place in some

paid choir, though it might be better not to use your voice in that way. Everything is possible."

"I may not have the slightest talent for acting."

"That is true, and the ridiculously small part you have in this play will not give me a chance of judging."

Here Florio saw a favourable opportunity for furthering the proposed change of parts.

"Why did you not take a good part?"

"You understand my position here, and have thoroughly appreciated Lady Grey! Why need you ask?"

"Pooh! In insignificant matters I should keep to myself and avoid the possibility of snubbing, but were anything useful to me, I would do it and care not a straw for any one! Why should I bow down to an idiot?"

"It cannot be helped now."

"You feel as if you could act, don't you? With your face and figure, and, above all, your intelligence, you could not be helpless. Only a little experience is required."

He looked at her critically.

"Well," he said after a moment, "you are young and will be rich; you can choose your own life. I am interested in you, but you don't like me. After all, I never did any one any good. If you took my advice, you might go to the mischief, and have me to thank for it. *Chi lo sa?*"

Florio did not miscalculate the effect of his words. They touched her.

"Signor Florio, you are very kind to me," she said. "If I took your advice I do not think I should be so mean as to attribute any bad consequences to you. I do not," she added hesitatingly, "dislike you."

You are rather an enigma to me, and you do interest me."

She ended smiling. He bowed with his hand on his heart.

"I ought to be satisfied. We shall be better friends by-and-by, perhaps. I must be off to write a letter now. Good-bye till the evening. Our last rehearsal to-day; no mistakes, please."

Ada walked up and down the room after he had left, thinking, in a restless, feverish sort of way.

Why was she not like other girls, who accepted their lot wherever it was cast? Was it discontentment merely, or was it an inborn feeling of having a different fate in life? Other girls were bright and pleasant; fulfilling their little duties; satisfied with the love and admiration which they won; stepping airily through life; falling in love with some one, and passing from one happy home to another. Why was she not like this? She might have made herself beloved at Oaklands, had she but unbent in the least; sacrificed her views somewhat, and adjusted herself to circumstances. She would have married Sydney and have had a happy home. Surely it meant something that all that had been impossible, and that she had gone away and chosen an isolated life—a life which did not satisfy her, and which she knew could not last? Why had she not thought of being an actress or singer before? Why should the idea, suggested by a man she rather feared than liked, have taken such hold of her? Perhaps it was but a longing for change and excitement which gave rise to her present state of mind, and all this was not the struggle of genius for expression, but the infirmity of a feverish sentimental brain? It could not be; the thought was not long admitted. In look-

ing back on the past history of her mind, all the views and opinions that had unfolded themselves in reflection, seemed to lead up to this,—the necessity of some work which would be the work of a life, not to be supplanted by any other; the performance of which would employ her best powers, and build up her life to that ideal which she had dreamt of. Carlyle's words were ringing in her ears:—"Genius even in its faintest scintillations is the inspired gift of God, a solemn mandate to its owner to go forth and labour in his sphere, to keep alive the sacred fire among his brethren, which the heavy and polluted atmosphere of this world is for ever threatening to extinguish. Woe to him if he neglect this mandate, if he hear not its still small voice! Woe to him if he turn this inspired gift into the servant of his evil or ignoble passions, if he offer it on the altar of vanity, if he sell it for a piece of money!"

It might be a profession, this of public singer, rather contemptible in the eyes of the world, but then what are the eyes of the world? Do they ever see below the surface? Each individual must take that mode of expression which nature has made the easiest to him, and through it work and speak. As the soul is more or less great, so will it shine through and glorify the vehicle through which it passes.

Thus, thought Ada, would her life be absorbed into the universal, and swell, even by the faintest wave, the flood of spiritual expression. Individual claims, individual interests would cease, and with them the fear and care attendant thereon, and it seemed to her she would be at rest because at work.

The thought of Florio in connection with this mental strife was unpleasant to Ada. She would not admit

that he had led her to this. It was the natural result of past thought and study. It was a stream shut in, which would have burst its barriers sooner or later.

The hours slipped by quickly, till she was called to lunch. No one had returned. Ada and Signor Florio lunched alone. At first they were very silent, 'Ada not thinking of his presence, Florio watching her. At last he drew her into conversation; first with trivial observations to which she was forced to reply; afterwards by ludicrous anecdotes of college life. He was different from what she had ever seen him; full of scornful humour; showing much knowledge of men and piercing observation. He imitated Lady Grey till Ada laughed and laughed again. No one escaped without a flash of his ridicule lighting on them. They lingered over the luncheon table. Ada was glad to be free for a while from importunate thought, and listened to him willingly.

As she got up to go, he said,

"I have made you laugh, have I not?"

"Indeed you have."

"I thought you had an air *ennuyée, triste*, and I made an attempt to banish your dulness."

"You have succeeded I think. Thank you."

As she said this she wondered why Florio's efforts to amuse her did not give her the impression of being an act of kindness, but rather, an easy display of power. Was she unjust to him as usual?

CHAPTER XXIII.

"ACHIEVEMENT IS COMMAND."

LILY came into the schoolroom at once when she came back from her drive, and found Ada there.

"We have spent such a stupid day," she said, "and I am so glad to be back again."

Ada smiled.

"I shall be glad when these theatricals are over and all those visitors gone."

"You have thought the play great fun, have you not?" said Ada. "You will quite miss the rehearsals and all the laughter and excitement."

"The rehearsals are very well, because you are nice, and Frank is good-natured, and after all if one makes mistakes it does not matter, but I hate the idea of acting before a number of people."

"You will not mind it a bit when you are dressed up and painted. I am sure you cannot feel like Lily Grey then!"

"Oh yes, I can very much when I see mamma armed with a fan and smelling salts, in case I break down, and looking at me with that half-pitying expression which you know! I really cannot do my part," she added, with energy, coming over to Ada where she sat by the fire.

"Oh! but you cannot escape at the last," Ada

answered smiling. "You are not really frightened; you will see how well the rehearsal will go to-night."

"No, I shall be a failure, and even Frank thinks so."

"Then what is to be done?"

"I don't know," she replied helplessly.

She was afraid yet to make the request that Frank had prepared her to do. She felt sure that Miss Knight would refuse.

"I think you will not break down," Ada said encouragingly. "I will go over it with you several times, and make you rehearse little parts where I think you are not quite perfect. Your brother is wrong to make you fancy that you cannot do it. It is quite a new idea of his too, he has always told you that you would do very well."

"He says he expected me to have made more progress. I drove with him coming home, and we had a long talk about it."

"Well, could he suggest nothing? It is very easy to find fault. The play cannot fall to the ground now, can it?"

"You must not be angry at what he suggested. He wants me to persuade you to change parts with me."

"Oh! no, that is not fair. I protested against acting from the first, and only took the maid's part to oblige you all."

"So I told him," Lily answered in a disconsolate way, "but he would insist on my asking you. As it was an unfortunate accident, my being so stupid, he thought you might do it rather than disappoint every one."

Ada looked annoyed and puzzled. It was most awkward. "You know, Lily," she said, "your mother won't like it, neither will your cousins. They will think that the part ought to be given to one of them; in fact, it will cause all sorts of disagreeableness."

Just then Frank and Florio passed.

"There," said Lily, tapping at the window, "I'll call Frank, and you shall hear all he has to say about it. I shall not ask you any more, when I know you do not like it."

The two men turned when they heard the noise, and came near.

"Hullo!" said Frank, "what is it?"

He knew quite well. Lily opened the window.

"I have asked Miss Knight, and she does not wish to do it. You must fight your own battle now."

They both stepped in and shut the window.

"You will not help us, Miss Knight?" asked Frank, in what he meant to be a very winning tone.

"I can't, I have not learnt the part. I said from the first I did not wish to act."

From the very number of excuses and volubility of reply, Frank saw ground for hope. If she were quite determined not to do it, fewer words would have done.

"I don't think really that Lily ought to do it," he said, sitting down beside her.

"You thought her equal to it yesterday."

"No, I did not really, but I fancied that she cared about it, and that it would be a disappointment to her to give it up, but I find I am mistaken, and she would be quite glad if you would take it. Eh, Lily?" he added, turning to her.

"I am sure Miss Knight would do it better than I should."

"I am not sure," answered Ada. "Why do you not ask one of your cousins?"

"Nonsense," said Frank impatiently. "Lisa has got a very good part, and Bella is too idiotic. Besides, why

change every one's part? If Bella acted with me I should throw something at her head before it was over!"

Ada laughed.

"Let Lily rehearse her part with you now," she said.

Florio was standing behind Ada's chair, and as she got up to fetch the play, he whispered,

"Why not avail yourself of this opportunity of acting, it may be useful?"

She had thought this herself, but opposed her own inclinations. She did not wish to act with Frank, she did not wish to subject herself to Lady Grey's vulgar criticism. There was a look of hesitation in her face which did not escape Frank.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I am afraid I shall break down if I act with Lily. I shall be so nervous about her. Do be persuaded."

"Frank has so thoroughly frightened me now," said Lily, "that nothing shall induce me to do Miss Hardcastle."

"The invitations are all out. To-morrow is the night of the performance. What is to be done?" asked Florio with a tragic air.

"You do it, Signor Florio," said Ada.

He shook his head.

"No, but if you will do it, I shall see that you do not fail. I will take every pains with you, and help you as much as possible—there—"

"I will do it, if I can," said Ada suddenly.

There was a general clapping of hands.

"How good of you," said Lily. "I know you hate it."

"Thank you very, very much," said Frank in a low and sentimental tone, trying to look very touched and devoted.

"Bravo!" said Florio, rubbing his hands gently.

"Now," he added, "how much of it do you know?"

"All of it I think, I have heard Miss Grey so often."

"I thought so, that is right. And the dresses?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the two girls, "we forgot that."

"Is there not a tuck to take up or let down or something?"

"We must try. There is not much time."

"You had better learn your new part, Lily," said her brother. "Come and study it with me now."

"How is this change of parts to be broken to the actors?" asked Ada.

"I shall arrange that at the last moment," said Florio.

Frank and Lily went off together. As they left the room, Florio said to Ada,

"You are annoyed about this, but you could not do otherwise than act. Under any circumstances you would be blamed, and it is just as well you should try yourself. I am not afraid of you. Run through the part with me now, will you?"

"Yes, I should like to feel quite sure."

"Very good," he said, when she had ended. "The excitement and light will add the necessary swing; it is hard to do it in cold blood."

She had remembered all Lily's defects, and the different things she had suggested to her, and she had carried out the latter in her own acting.

She was excited already, and Florio detected the true spirit of an actress in the glow of her eyes, and easy adaptation of voice, face, and attitude to the part she assumed. Part of his plan had succeeded.

"I want," he said, "this evening's rehearsal to be

as conscientiously done as if it were the performance. Can you have the alterations made in the dresses in time?"

"I'll try. I had better see about it at once."

Ada left the room, play in hand, repeating her part to herself. Florio smiled as the door closed, walked up and down the room two or three times, and betook himself to the library, to listen to Frank and his sister and give a little timely advice of different kinds.

"How are you getting on?" he asked Lily, as he entered.

"Very well, there is really nothing to learn."

"Don't you see, child," said Frank, "it is a much better plan; you will have all the fun and none of the trouble."

"Yes, but it would have been amusing to have played the lover with you; it would have been so ridiculous." She laughed at the thought.

"You would play it better with any one else," said Florio.

Lily blushed and laughed, and thought it rather a clever remark of the Signor's.

"Miss Knight is in an agony over the dresses; can you not grow a little so as to suit in stature?"

"I wish I could," she said smiling.

"Only for the occasion; you would not wish it to continue. Your characteristic is to be *petite*."

Lily thought it a pretty compliment and blushed again. She was at the age when praise is gratefully received, be it of the mildest sort. It looked particularly pleasant with the background of her mother's snubbings to reflect upon.

Florio was thinking how well the word suited Lily,

mentally and bodily. He had rather a contempt for that class of woman.

"I think I had better go and help Miss Knight; she may want to measure me."

With these words Lily left the room.

Frank turned to Florio, with a smile of unconcealed glee.

"So Miss Knight consented after all," he said. "It was not so difficult to persuade her."

"I should think you were always tolerably successful in your entreaties. I did not expect to see Miss Knight give in so quickly."

"You had something to do with it, I fancy," said Frank suspiciously. "Those few words that passed between you, eh?"

"Would you like to know what they were?"

"No, my dear fellow, I was only jesting. I have no curiosity."

"Whenever I hear a man say that, I begin to think him the most inquisitive fellow living!"

"It is not my besetting sin, nevertheless."

"Perhaps not," (with a shrug of the shoulders), "but you will not object to hear what I said to Miss Knight?"

"No."

"I whispered, 'Don't spoil the play, I know Mr. Grey will act well with you.'"

"You are too flattering, Florio!"

"I said it as an experiment. To tell you the truth, I thought my friend Miss Knight was tolerably free from vanity, and it would matter very little to her who admired her, but I am mistaken; women are all alike."

"'Pon my word I don't see why you should expect admiration to be such a matter of indifference to them. What else have they got to amuse them? Of course a great deal depends on where the admiration comes from."

"Of course," said Florio acquiescently, with a slight smile, which only his moustache was cognisant of. "I should think the play would go very well now," he continued; "but beware," he said laughing, "lest Miss Knight and you should throw too much expression into your parts!"

"Poor girl," said Frank reflectively, "what hot water she would get into with my mother!"

"Let us go and dress for dinner," he added abruptly.

Poor fool! thought Florio, as he walked upstairs, so confident is he that Miss Knight is in love with him that he is sure to make an ass of himself before long. To-morrow night I trust his love-making will have such a reception as he looks not for. His vanity will be hurt and he will be furious. He is so empty-headed that I should not be surprised if he lets it out to his mother, and then there will be the devil to pay! If there is to be a row, I hope it will take place before I leave. Miss St. George will see that I was right. If it comes to that, I should like to stick up for her. She will see I am her friend. If she were turned adrift she might be glad to accept my offer of help. A man must do a kindness sometimes, though small thanks he gets for it!

"Why does that girl dislike me?" thought Florio, as he got ready for dinner. "She knows nothing of my history; there can be no prejudice in her mind against me, and yet she prefers the society of that fool Grey!"

I think she will change her mind to-morrow night, when he expects her to receive his love-making as an honour. The governess noticed by the son of the house, his attentions should be received in a humble spirit! I can be of use to her if she will allow me. The poor devil of a music master, living by his wits, has tolerable power over men. Bah! I know them so well;—all striving to keep up a reputation; drawing back with shrinkings and shudderings from their fellow-man, because the world has seen some stain in him; while their own hands are dyed deep enough, only the sun has not shone on them. Everything is colourless in the dark. Can love gain you anything in this world?"

He shrugged his shoulders with a contemptuous and disgusted expression.

"What will respect for the world's laws do for you? Reduce you to a contemptible idiot, that's all! Power is the only thing to give one a moment's satisfaction. When people are so blind as not to see things of themselves, it is glorious to watch the day of reckoning coming when their eyes *must* open.

"Here am I," he thought, looking round on the comfortable room, the firelight gleaming on everything with its glow of warmth; his candles burning on his dressing-table. "I owe all this to myself. Condemned by injustice to be nobody; hemmed in so that my life is a cautious creeping on, instead of a free bound over difficulties. What have I not done?"

"Every day I learn my power more and more. A man is his own law. If he despises all things, he can do most things.

"There is a curse on every one who has marred my life. I know it. If they have made me suffer, they

shall suffer themselves. It is only justice. Not the poor shift for justice that the world's laws make, but the justice that every brave man will see done, though all be against him.

"I am not bad," he reflected, "if people would get out of my way. I can lend a hand to a poor wretch that wants it, and not think that I've done something very fine, as is the manner of some righteous folk. But," (here his face darkened, and his hands closed convulsively) "I will have an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; it is the oldest and only manly law."

His face was not pleasant to see in the solitude of his own room. He was "not bad," perhaps, but that iron will might be a cruel possession. By its force it was easy to justify individual acts, though they might be in opposition to accepted laws. Look at them from a different point of view. When it was an established law that the earth was stationary, the whole solar system was supposed to work in a different way. The light came, and everything was viewed from an opposite point! Florio would metamorphose the moral law to suit himself, and there was a strange ring of truth in his thoughts and words. The bitterness of his life had made him see through the smiling lies of the world, but not deeper still into the truth and beauty that struggles and lives. Very dangerous in a man without any elevated ideal was that strange power of mind and unconquerable spirit which was his.

Why should one ever forgive anything? he thought. Life, fate, or whatever it may be named, never forgives! Any rash step once taken is never retrieved. Every mistake makes it impossible to be in quite the same position as you were before that mistake.

It had been a strange life, this Signor Florio's! This man who, by those who knew him, was considered a clever fellow, and about whose antecedents no one was very clear—this vagabond singing-master, who led a Bohemian life, and lived on no one knew what,—this Signor Florio, or rather Geoffrey Kingsley, had much to reflect upon in the past! Four years ago, when on ticket-of-leave in Australia, a mistake in the prison records had given him a chance of escaping from the country. It was stated that Geoffrey Kingsley had died in prison. How the mistake occurred no one knew, no one was ever likely to know.

He thought of it all this evening. He thought of it often—how, hearing of his supposed death, he resolved to get back to England—how he got out of port hidden in a merchant vessel, and worked his way home as a common sailor.

I made those I wanted like me even then, thought he, that fellow Goldoni, whom I talked Italian to and sang for.

It was the one soft spot in Florio's memory, the thought of this Italian enthusiast, this music maniac, with the big heart and child's brain; who recognised the refinement of manner and bearing in this stow-away, and used to spend hours with him on the lower deck. He had no prying curiosity about Florio's past history. He was very delighted to find some one who could speak his language; he was full of admiration for his voice and wanted to be of use to him. By his advice Geoffrey took the name of Florio. "These English fools they like one Italian name," he had said; and when they came to England it was by Goldoni's introductions that Florio first got work as a singing-master.

Now Goldoni was dead. He had believed in him, and Florio had nothing to hope or fear from him. He thought of him always tenderly, and so doing felt that if people only acted well to him, he had as much heart, perhaps more, than those who boasted of its possession.

After fifteen years of absence, to tread the old streets, pass men who had known him, enter places of amusement often frequented by him, and never be recognised ! It was strange.

He was dead. There was no such person now as Geoffrey Kingsley. His bones lay rotting in a criminal's grave. The old country-house was in the hands of his brother. His father was dead. His sister was dead. Herbert was the true and rightful heir. How he must have thanked his stars that a kindly fever had ended the convict's life. In the book of Landed Gentry there stood now this entry,—Geoffrey Kingsley, deceased, without issue, 10 June, 18—.

It was but slowly that Florio recognised that for Geoffrey Kingsley there was no more existence. Why should he not take his place amongst his fellows and fill the position which was truly his ? He was not changed or unfitted for it, because of *that one act*. If it had not happened he would be at Crofton now ; sought after, respected.

Fifteen years ago he had been deceived, betrayed ; lying words had been spoken to him, in return for words of truth, and he had crushed the life out of the lying tongue ! It was an act of madness, but of just madness. You may strike a ruffian that flies at your throat, but not the woman who kills your soul ! Yet, after the hell of the past years, if he were to step forward and acknowledge his existence and his return to his own land, thou-

sands of tongues would cry against him; not a friendly hand would be outheld; his brother, the *rightful* heir to Crofton, would give his valuable evidence, as he had done before, and Geoffrey Kingsley would be consigned anew to perdition!

No, he was dead—but there are resurrections in this world sometimes, whatever there may be in the next. The time had not yet come.

He laughed sometimes to see how easy it was to outwit men, how easy to him to get people into his power. That poor boy Sydney! It was not hard to lead him to fool away his money and his life. Sometimes he had a mingled feeling of pity and contempt for the boy, but he was the son of the man for whom he had been deserted and deceived—why should he save him from a fate which was only justice?

His luck at play, his talent for music, his good manners, Florio smiled to think how he had made them all useful to him, and had lived in ease and safety when other men would have lost heart and gone to the mischief.

His link with the St. George family seemed not likely to break. This debt of Sydney's—only money lost at play—was a bond. Then how strangely he had stumbled on this girl Ada! He was willing enough to be her friend. Why should he not? There was no bitter remembrance in her case which his heart throbbed to avenge; on the contrary, inasmuch as her uncle was her enemy, theirs was a common cause—a fraternity of hatred, stronger in a mind like Geoffrey's than a fraternity of love.

Ada must take his help as he meant to give it. She must be made to feel his power. What did she know

in her ignorance and weakness? He would guide her. It was only a matter of time, she must give in.

Strong in this man's nature was the love of dominion. His was an inflexible will which opposing circumstances could, at any moment, deepen into unwavering cruelty, and this was closely associated with an utter fearlessness, which has in it ever a savage beauty.

Fifteen years had changed Geoffrey Kingsley quite beyond recognition. A long black beard and a moustache, on a face which had been kept closely shaven; long hair brushed back in foreign fashion, instead of the close English cut; the figure much broader; all was changed, even the expression — fifteen years of convict life in the bloom of his manhood could not fail to alter it, because it could not fail to leave its traces on the soul of the man. For greater security Florio wore spectacles.

He had met men and women whom he had known in his youth, but there was no glance of recognition in their eyes. Surely Geoffrey Kingsley was dead! Would he ever rise from his grave?

Signor Florio was roused from his reflections by the sound of the gong. He had so far forgotten the routine of life that his toilette was not complete.

"How angry her ladyship will be that I dared to be a moment late!" he thought, as he adjusted a flower in his button-hole, and went down.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“THE END CROWNS ALL.”

THE theatre—as they laughingly called it—crammed with seats, the foot-lights in perfect order, and all the actors in costume; this was what Ada saw when she came down, and Florio took her to look at everything before he play began. She had her book in her hand, conning over her part, while the others talked and laughed.

“You are not nervous?” asked Florio, looking at her anxiously.

“Yes, very.”

“What have you to be afraid of? I am quite sure of you.”

Yet he was glad of her nervousness. It is only obtuseness which is quite at its ease. She had, he thought, quite enough self-reliance to carry her through.

After Florio had taken Ada round and given her some last directions about exits, he brought her up to Frank.

“You two stick together between the scenes,” he said, “and rehearse bits that you are not sure of. Mind, I rely on you two; all my wits will be given to the others.”

“That is a capital plan, is it not?” said Frank, giving her a chair, and perching himself on a table close to her. “How do you feel? Up to the mark, eh?”

“I know it pretty well, I think. Do the first scene with me.”

"No, let us talk. You are always boxed up in that schoolroom, poking over books or teaching Lily; it is absurd for people to live under the same roof and see so little of each other as we do."

"Rehearse our scene together, please; we cannot know it too well."

Ada was too engrossed by the thought of acting to feel annoyed at his words, or indeed to know clearly what he was saying. She was as excited as any actress at a public *début*. She was no longer Ada St. George, but thoroughly Miss Hardcastle; ready to act the trivial incidents of her life as if they were existing facts.

The fund of playfulness, the strong spring of young life and quick imagination, which lay so long unused in Ada's nature, bubbled up now, even for this small performance, and it had all the interest of a great event in her life. It was more real, more exciting, than she had anticipated, and she felt that Florio was right, and that there was something in her—the artistic element—which claimed to be heard, and inspired her to do even this in a true spirit, and as perfectly as could be.

"Very well," said Frank, "anything you wish, but I think it is better to know the words like a parrot, and leave all effect to the impulse of the moment."

"That may do for you, but I am too much afraid of myself."

"All right, begin then," he said, throwing himself into an attitude, and speaking his first words to her.

She answered him and was quite in earnest about it, even there in the green-room, while the others were talking and sometimes stopping their chatter to laugh at her. She never heeded them.

"How well you look in that dress," Frank said,

suddenly breaking off, "and yet there is nothing very pretty in the dress itself."

"It must be the paint," she replied, laughing; "I think I am quite a success. I have painted as well as if I had been at it all my life."

She did not feel as if in her own character to-night, and took Frank's compliments lightly and jestingly.

"You are charming," he said, drawing a little closer to her, and looking at her with rather freely expressed admiration in his eyes.

It was the hour of the evening when young men with a tolerable amount of self-conceit are more than ordinarily confident. A prolonged dinner and generous wines have filled them with expanded feelings towards the world. With a man, they open their hearts and tell him a great deal of their private history; hating him next morning and wondering why they were such stupid fools as to talk to that fellow. With a woman—specially one they admire,—any little latent fancy they have had for her assumes astounding proportions, and they try to look unutterable things, and succeed in looking—fools. Anything Ada might have thought of Mr. Frank Grey's remark was banished by the sound of the audience taking their seats.

The hum of voices created quite a thrill of excitement in the green-room, and Ada's heart beat fast.

Bella Cathcart peeped through a tiny hole in the curtain, and commenced reporting the arrivals to her sister, who did not pay the slightest attention to her, but whispered with Linton, looking across at Frank and laughing. Lily was running from one to the other, seeing if their attire was complete, and in a state of childish glee with the whole thing.

"I am really glad, Frank," she said, coming up to her brother, "that you made me give up my part; there is no weight on my mind, and I can enjoy myself."

"I told you so, child. Always believe what I tell you, and you won't be far wrong."

The overture was ended, and Florio stepped before the curtain. All the actors crowded up to the side to hear his speech. It was not a long one.

"Ladies and gentlemen,—Owing to the extreme timidity of one of our actresses, who was to have taken the part of Miss Hardcastle, there has been a slight change in the caste. Miss Knight has kindly consented at a few hours' notice to represent Miss Hardcastle. Miss Grey will fill her place as maid. We ask the indulgence of the audience for Miss Knight, who has had such a limited time for the study of the part."

It struck Ada curiously—nervous as she was—that Signor Florio's accent was more than usually foreign as he made this speech.

There was great applause, and Lily, behind the scenes, clapped vigorously, looking across at Ada triumphantly.

"Why, it is quite like a real theatre," she whispered.

The Miss Cathcarts thought it rather early in the proceedings for Miss Knight to receive an ovation, and looked at each other expressively. A little later it was time for Ada to go on.

She could not distinguish any one. Everything was quite misty, and her voice was tremulous, but quite distinct. By-and-bye, she forgot all about the audience, and became interested in her part.

Florio, looking at her from the side, forgot to prompt, and watched her with a complacent smile on his face.

She moved with ease, no stiffness, no awkwardness with her arms, but little simple expressive gestures gave force to what she said. She had not much to do in the first scene, but Florio knew that every one would watch for her re-appearance.

"How well you did it!" said Frank when she came off. "You cannot be nervous any more now."

"Yes, I can," she answered, "I am not thoroughly in it yet."

"Very nicely acted," said the eldest Miss Cathcart in a patronising tone.

Lily took her hand, and looking at her affectionately, said in her childish way,—

"I knew you would be nice," and then hurried off to watch everything that was going on.

"We had better get away from the shifting of the scenes," said Frank, drawing Ada back a little towards the far end of the room.

"How white you are!" he added suddenly, "let me bring you a glass of wine?"

"No, I would not take it."

He was rather glad; it would have been a great bore to go and get it.

"How frightened you were!" he said with astonishment, looking at her hands, which she could not prevent trembling a little. "You look such a calm person generally, but those are the women who feel things most. Is it not so?"

"I am sure I don't know," she said laughing, "I was dreadfully afraid of breaking down and spoiling your play, that is all."

Frank did not like this unsentimental way of treating

his words. He thought they ought to have conveyed a world of meaning to her.

"Why try to hide your character from me?" he said, half angrily, half languishingly.

She looked round at him with astonishment, then laughed.

"I can't quite understand you; but I think it would be more amusing to see what is going on than to play at cross questions and crooked answers!" Thereupon she got up and came close to the stage. Frank followed.

"You are only in the way here," said Florio, "it creates confusion. I am sorry, but I wish you would sit down somewhere; you can judge by the applause how the piece is going on."

"I told you so," said Frank triumphantly.

"That's a contemptible triumph!" Ada answered laughing, and going back to her corner reluctantly.

"Why should I not rejoice in anything that gives me an opportunity of talking to you, instead of looking at my idiotic cousins?"

Frank was one of those men who think that ridicule of one woman to another is a compliment to the woman they address.

All this worried Ada horribly; it spoiled the illusion of the play. It made her feel the necessity of being in her every-day character.

"Don't talk to me," she said almost petulantly. "I shall not act well if you do. I want to study my part. Your conversation puts me out."

Frank took this sentence in the way most pleasing to himself.

"I shan't talk to you then, but you cannot object to my looking at you."

He leaned back in his chair and rested his eyes on her. She said nothing, but took her copy and began to repeat it to herself. A few minutes later Florio called them both.

"Now then," he said, "distinguish yourselves."

He whispered in Frank's ear, "Don't be afraid of being too loving. *C'est permis*. She will like it."

Ada threw herself into her part quickly. She forgot Frank's nonsense in the green-room; in fact, she did not connect him at all with the present character. She idealised her part, as from her nature she could not fail to do. She looked through Frank and beyond him, and coquetted with young Marlowe with a pretty ease and gracefulness. What playfulness, what tenderness, there was in her eyes and voice! what winning softness of expression and movement! It was not a part Florio would have chosen for her, yet she acted it without exaggeration, simply and truly. Frank, poor fool! thought it was all for him.

Florio forgot his prompting again, but it did not matter. He watched her with a glow of admiration such as he had not felt for many a year. She was a true actress. He was sure of her voice before; now he was sure of her acting. Her career in life was quite fixed. Every one was delighted except Lady Grey, who put up her eye-glass and muttered,—

"Wonderful assurance!"

"Bravo," said Florio as Ada came off, "you have really done well."

She felt satisfied with his praise.

The Miss Cathcarts began to feel themselves insignificant—mere padding in fact, and having no dramatic talent or feeling, went on with their parts sulkily.

"How splendid ! How beautiful you were in that scene," said Frank. "Surely you felt it ? It was not mere acting to *me*."

She did not answer because she would have said something rude.

"How distraite you are " he continued.

She moved away a little, and at that moment Florio called her aside.

"Do you see," he said, showing her his copy of the play, "the alteration, or rather addition, I have made in this next scene ? I have introduced a song for you."

"I can't sing," she said quickly.

"Why not ? It will be very effective."

"You should have told me."

"No, you would have refused. You must do it now, and you can. I shall play the introductory notes ; if nothing follows, it will astonish the audience somewhat."

He spoke in a jesting way, but somehow Ada felt that she must obey him.

"It will be good for you. You know the words and air perfectly, *les gestes* will come."

She said nothing, but Florio knew that she would do it.

Ada's next scene with Frank was as successful as the first, and as Florio calculated, the song had a great effect. There were few critical enough to find it out of place. Florio had introduced it for his own ends, not because he thought it suitable. The song was quite simple, it demanded nothing but expression, which Ada gave without effort.

"What a voice !" ran from lip to lip. Even Ada heard it and blushed. She was called before the curtain,

and Frank took her hand in actor-like fashion, and seemed unwilling to relinquish it when he led her back to the green-room. The room was empty, for the other performers were either on the stage or standing ready to be called. Frank suddenly bent and kissed her hand. She turned to him indignantly, but before she could speak he said,

"Why may I not kiss your hand here, when I did so two minutes ago on the stage?"

"We were acting then, you were not Mr. Grey, nor I Miss Knight."

"What nonsense, Ada!" he said, speaking very low, "do drop that affectation. You are not the governess to me *now*, you could not have acted like that if you did not feel it."

She looked at him for a second as if thinking how, in fewest words, to silence him, then said,

"If you fancy that my looks and words on the stage were intended for you, you are quite wrong. I am very sorry. I cannot see how any one could be so stupid. If I cared for you in the least, I should think it would be impossible for me to have acted as I did."

He looked angry and incredulous.

"I do not believe you," he whispered.

She got up with a shrug of her shoulders, habitual to her when she could not readily find words to express her meaning, and moved a step away from him.

He caught her hand.

"Don't you see I love you!" he muttered. "Your looks just now were not mere coquetry; why try to deceive me?"

He held her hand so tightly she could not withdraw it easily from his grasp without a struggle. The whole scene

struck her suddenly as so absurd that her face changed, and she burst out laughing and said involuntarily, .

"Have you any idea how utterly ridiculous all this is?"

He dropped her hand instantly. Whether her words had made him do so, or the presence of his mother, Ada could not tell; for looking towards the common entrance to the green-room she saw Lady Grey appearing! It was a horrible moment. Ada wished she had never taken any part in the theatricals; never left Oaklands; never seen any of these people. She thought of herself with infinite contempt. How undignified in demeanour she must be, when any man could venture to make love to her in this way! Why should she stand abashed and confused when Lady Grey came in, as if she had been blameable, when truly Mr. Grey had been unbearably impertinent. In one instant she thought all this, but before she could speak or move, Florio stepped forward from the stage door.

"Yes, that will do," he said coming up to them. "Very good indeed, only Mr. Grey's position is rather awkward, he should have—"

Here he broke off suddenly, apparently noticing Lady Grey for the first time.

"Ah," he said, turning to her with a smile, "you find me giving a lesson. We lose no time here."

Lady Grey looked rather puzzled; she had not been near enough to Frank and Ada to hear their words, so the explanation sounded natural.

Frank looked at his ease in a minute, and Ada smiled slightly and looked most gratefully at Florio.

"It is nearly at an end, is it not, signor?" asked Lady Grey, looking across Ada, with a slight uplifting of the head.

"Yes, very soon. You find it tedious, do you not?"

"Rather. Amateur performances always are. Where is my daughter?"

"At the side, watching the play. I cannot spare her just now. All the actors in the green-room at once," he added. The space being limited, Lady Grey retired.

The last scene did not go very well. Ada forgot her part, and had to substitute other words, which threw out the next speaker. However, they were applauded and had to appear before the curtain in due form. Most of them hurried away at once to join the audience, and hear the opinions on the piece. Ada found herself alone with Signor Florio, except for the presence of the servants who were putting things straight.

"I am so sorry you should have been annoyed by that fool," he said, coming up to her.

"I expected to be reminded that you had warned me about him. It is generous of you not to do so."

"Why should I?" he answered carelessly. "I am vexed that you were worried; it spoiled your acting in the last scene."

"Of course it did," she said angrily. "It would have been worse though, if you had not skilfully come in when Lady Grey appeared. I thank you very much."

"Pooh, pooh, a man of the world always finds it easy to help people out of difficulties of that kind. You do not find even in the quiet of a governess' life that unpleasant people can be avoided, do you? As an actress you would at least be treated as an equal, and men would not consider that their vulgar and impertinent addresses were an honour to you, and must necessarily be received as such."

Florio knew that his words would have effect, spoken at this moment.

"I dare say you are right. I have no experience. I did not expect to encounter such disagreeableness as I have done to-night, in a house where I supposed refinement and good manners were understood." She was so angry she felt she must talk about it.

Florio laughed scornfully.

"I am old," he said, "and nothing surprises me.

"Come along," he added, "and have some supper now."

"No. What should I do among all those people? I am tired, I shall go to bed."

"What shall I do among all those people?" he answered, laughing; "keep me company to show that you are grateful to me for having told such an admirable lie!"

She took his arm, and they went into the supper room together. He got her whatever she wanted, which was not much, but did not talk. He kept looking round the room in a restless way.

"Are you looking for any one?" she said at last.

"Yes, I thought there might be some friend of mine here. Or enemy," he muttered to himself.

Then he grew talkative.

"Lady Grey," he said, "is such a fool, she amuses me. She is a true woman, though. I have seen several men come up to her and talk about you, and ask to be introduced. Each time the same expression comes in her vulgar face. 'Ah, that is my daughter's governess;' and the men have to be contented. I don't know whether they are or not; I should not be."

"What would you do?" asked Ada, smiling.

"If I could not be introduced in an orthodox way I would introduce myself. I am not easily baulked in anything I have determined on. It is not worth living if we give in at every obstacle.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "I go away to-morrow morning early. I shall probably not see you again."

"I am sorry you are going."

She said it sincerely. She began to think that she had been unjust to Signor Florio. To-night at least he had shown himself her friend, and she felt grateful.

"You are truly?" he asked in an anxious way.

She nodded.

"I shall give you an address in London which will find me quicker than that which you have."

He took out his pocket-book as he spoke, and wrote it down.

"You may think of what I have been telling you, and find it possible to give up this drudging life. You are only wasting your talent and cramping your powers here."

He handed her his address.

"I know, I know," she said impatiently as she took it, "but I am so hedged in by circumstances, movement is impossible at present. It is a horrible feeling, the time slipping by and nothing to be done. That impossible motionlessness, that ripening or decaying of mental power, is a thought who ought to make us take no rest."

A strange look came in his face.

"To be helpless is the torture of the damned," he said, in a fierce way.

He was thinking of his own position. Wide apart

were they in their thoughts, though the words spoken were an apparent bond of understanding.

"You will find some means of carrying out your plan of being a singer, if you care enough for it," Florio said, after a minute's silence. "No one knows how much power he has until he determines to do something. Up to a certain point he that will—can. But he cannot practically undo what he has once done, at least not always.

"*Allons*," he added, "they are all going to dance, I believe; let us look on."

"I shall go to bed," she answered.

After the excitement and annoyance of the evening, she felt little inclined to join or watch the dancing.

She had never danced since that ball which was always present in her memory. Her life seemed cruelly sad to-night. It was better to shut herself as soon as possible into her shell. Occurrences, pleasant or otherwise, had too much effect on her. It was more suited to her to lead the life of a recluse, with books and quiet thoughts; it might not be bright, but it was calm.

"Come out at this door then," said Florio, seeing from her expression that she was resolved to go.

He led her into the corridor at the foot of the stairs.

"Good-night and good-bye."

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips. She did not feel offended at it to-night. Florio seemed her only friend.

"You will write to me if you want me," he said, "and you will try to consider me your friend."

He watched her go up the stairs and waved his hand to her. It puzzled him why he should feel so interested in this girl. It was no object to him to befriend her,

and yet he did not mean to lose sight of her. How well his little scheme had worked !

He stroked his beard complacently, and walked up and down the corridor instead of going to the dancing-room.

The reaction of feeling from Grey's impertinence had made her recognise his—Florio's—worth. Well, it is natural enough, he reflected, Grey is a snob, and fifteen years of convict life have left me more of a gentleman than he is. In that respect I am still Geoffrey Kingsley.

He recalled Ada's gestures and movements in acting. It is the touch of southern blood gives her such grace, cancelling English stiffness. She will be a much finer woman in a few years, when she gains more depth and repose in her character. Much too visionary. It would require a strong will and practised mind to guide her ; but all that excess of feeling could be utilised.

END OF VOL. II.









